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THE FATAL THREE.

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ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER X.—(*continued*).

NOTHING could be more strongly marked than the contrast between the two men as they stood facing each other in the golden light of afternoon. Greswold, tall, broad-shouldered, rugged-looking in his rough brown heather suit and deerstalking cap, carrying a thick stick, with an iron fork at the end of it, for the annihilation of chance weeds in his peregrinations. His fine and massive features had a worn look, his cheeks were hollow, his dark hair and beard were grizzled here and there, his dark complexion had lost the hue of youth. He looked ten years older than his actual age.

Before him stood the Italian, graceful, gracious in every line and every movement; his features delicately chiselled, his eyes dark, full and bright; his complexion of that milky pallor which is so often seen with hair tending towards red, his brown beard of silkiest texture, his hands delicately modelled and of ivory whiteness, his dress imbued with all the grace which a fashionable tailor can give to the clothes of a man who cultivates the beautiful even in the barren field of nineteenth-century costume. It was impossible that so marked a contrast could escape Mildred's observation altogether; yet she perceived it dimly. The picture came back to her memory afterwards in more vivid colours.

She made the necessary introduction, and then proceeded to pour out the tea, leaving the two men to talk to each other.

"Your name has an Italian sound," Greswold said presently.

"It is a Milanese name. My father was a native of Milan. My mother was French, but she was educated in England, and all her proclivities were English. It was at her desire my father sent me to Rugby, and afterwards to Cambridge. Her fatal illness

called me back to Italy immediately after I had got my degree, and it was some years before I again visited England."

"Were you in Italy all that time?" asked Greswold, looking down absently and with an unwonted trouble in his face.

Mildred sat at the tea table, the visitor waiting upon her, insisting upon charging himself with her husband's cup as well as his own, an attention and reversal of etiquette of which Mr. Greswold seemed unconscious. Kassandra had returned with her master from a long walk, and was lying at his feet in elderly exhaustion. She saluted the stranger with a suppressed growl when he approached with the tea cups. Kassandra adored her own people, but was not remarkable for civility to strangers.

"Yes, I wasted four or five years in the South—in Florence, in Venice, or along the Riviera, wandering about like Satan, not having made up my mind what to do in the world."

Greswold was silent, bending down to play with Kassandra, who wagged her tail with a gentle largo movement, in grateful contentment.

"You must have heard my father's name when you were at Milan," said Castellani. "His music was fashionable *there*."

Mildred looked up with a surprised expression. She had never heard her husband talk of Milan, and yet this stranger mentioned his residence there as if it were an established fact.

"How did you know I was ever at Milan?" asked Greswold, looking up sharply.

"For the simplest of reasons. I had the honour of meeting you on more than one occasion at large assemblies, where my insignificant personality would hardly impress itself upon your memory. And I met you a year later at Lady Lochinvar's palace at Nice, soon after your first marriage."

Mildred looked up at her husband. He was pale as ashes, his lips whitening as she gazed at him. She felt her own cheeks paling; felt a sudden coldness creeping over her, as if she were going to faint. She watched her husband dumbly, expecting him to tell this man that he was mistaken, that he was confounding him, George Greswold, with some one else; but Greswold sat silent, and presently, as if to hide his confusion, bent again over the dog, who got up suddenly and licked his face in a gush of affection—as if she knew—as if she knew!

He had been married before, and he had told his wife not one word of that first marriage. There had been no hint of the fact that he was a widower when he asked John Fausset for his daughter's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF DOUBT.

ENDERBY Church clock struck six. They heard every chime, slow and clear in the summer air, as they sat in the broad shadow of the cedar, silent all three.

It seemed as if the striking of the clock were the breaking of a spell.

"So late?" exclaimed Castellani, in a cheery voice; "and I promised Mrs. Hillersdon to be back in time to drive to Romsey for the evening service. The old Abbey Church of Romsey, she tells me, is a thing to dream about. There is no eight o'clock dinner at Riverdale on Sundays. Every one goes to church somewhere, and we sup at half-past nine, and after supper there is sometimes extempore prayer—and sometimes there are charades or dumb crambo. *C'est selon*. When the Prince was there they had dumb crambo. Good-bye. I am almost ashamed to ask if I may ever come again, after having burdened you for such an unconscionable time."

He had the easiest air possible, and seemed totally unconscious of any embarrassment caused by his allusions to the past; and yet in both faces, as he looked from one to the other, he must have seen the strongest indications of trouble.

Mrs. Greswold murmured something to the effect that she would be glad to see him at any time, a speech obviously conventional and unmeaning. Mr. Greswold rose hastily and accompanied him to the hall door, where the cart still waited for him, the groom fixed as a statue of despondency.

Mr. Castellani was inclined to be loquacious to the last. Greswold was brief almost to incivility. He stood watching the light cart roll away, and then went slowly back to the garden and to his seat under the cedar.

He seated himself there in silence, looking earnestly at his wife, whose drooping head and fixed attitude told of deepest thought. So they sat for some minutes in dead silence, Cassandra licking her master's pendant hand, as he leaned forward with his elbow on his knee, infinitely sorry for him.

Mildred was the first to break that silence.

"George, why did you not tell me," she began in a low faltering voice, "that I was not your first wife? What reason could there be for concealment between you and me? I so trusted you, I so loved you. Nothing you could have told would have changed me.

"Dearest, there was one reason, and a powerful one," answered George Greswold firmly, meeting the appealing look of her eyes with a clear and steady gaze. "My first marriage is a sad re-

membrance for me, full of trouble. I did not care to tell you that miserable story, to call a dreaded ghost out of the grave of the past. My first marriage was the one great sorrow of my life, but it was only an episode in my life. It left me as lonely as it found me. There are very few who know anything about it. I am sorry that young man should have come here to trouble us with his unnecessary reminiscences. For my own part, I cannot remember having ever seen his face before."

"I am sorry you should have kept such a secret from me," said Mildred. "It would have been so much wiser to have been candid. Do you think I should not have respected your sad remembrances? You had only to say to me, 'Such things were, but let us not talk of them.' It would have been more manly—it would have been kinder to me."

"Say that I was a coward, if you like—that I am still a coward, where those memories are concerned," said Greswold.

The look of agony in his face melted her in a moment. She threw herself on her knees beside his chair, she and the dog fawning upon him together.

"Forgive me, forgive me, dearest," she pleaded; "I will never speak to you of this again. Women are so jealous—of the past most of all."

"Is that all?" he said; "God knows you have little need. Let us say no more, Mildred. The past is past, neither you nor I can alter it. Memory is inexorable. God himself cannot change it."

"I will contrive that Mr. Castellani shall not come here again, George, if you object to see him."

"Pray, don't trouble yourself. I would not have such a worm suppose that he could be obnoxious to me."

"Tell me what you think of him," she asked in a lighter tone, anxious to bring back the easy mood of every-day life. "He seems very clever, and he is rather handsome."

"What do I think of the trumpet ash on the verandah yonder? A beautiful parasite, which will hold on anywhere in the sunshine. Mr. Castellani is of the same family I take it—studies his own interests first, and chooses his friends afterwards. He will do admirably for Riverdale."

"He plays divinely. His touch transformed my piano."

"He looks the kind of man who would play the piano," said Greswold with ineffable contempt, looking down at his own sunburnt hands, hardened by exposure to all weathers, broadened by handling gun and punt-pole, and by half-a-dozen other forms of out-door exercise. "However, I have no objection to him, if he serves to amuse you and Pamela."

He spoke with a kind of weary indifference, as of a man who cared for very little in life; and then he rose slowly, took up his stick, and strolled off to the shrubbery.

Pamela appeared on the following afternoon with boxes, bags, music books, racquets and parasols, in a proportion which gave promise of a long visit. She had asked as a tremendous favour to be allowed to bring Box—otherwise Fitz-Box—her fox terrier, son of Sir Henry Mountford's Box, great grandson of Brockenhurst Joe, by that distinguished animal's daughter, Lyndhurst Jessie, and on the father's side a lineal descendant of Mr. Murchison's Cracknel.

"I hope you won't mind very much," she wrote; "but it would be death to him if I were to leave him behind. To begin with, his brother Fitz-Cox, who has a villainous temper, would inevitably kill him; and besides that he would pine to death at not sleeping in my room at night, which he has done ever since he was a puppy. If you will let me bring him, I will answer for his good manners, and that he shall not be a trouble to any one."

The descendant of Brockenhurst Joe rushed out into the garden, and made a lightning circuit of lawn and shrubberies, while his young mistress was kissing her Aunt Mildred, as she called her uncle's wife in the fulness of her affection.

"It is so very good of you to have me, and I am so delighted to come!" she said.

Mildred would have much preferred that she were anywhere else, yet could not help feeling kindly to her. She was a frank, bright-looking girl, with brown eyes and almost flaxen hair, a piquant contrast, for the hair was genuine, and carried out in the eyebrows, which were only just a shade darker. Her complexion was fair to transparency, and she had just enough soft rosy bloom to light up the delicate skin. Her nose was slightly *retroussé*, her mouth was a little wider than she herself approved, but her teeth were perfection. She had a charming figure of the plump order, but its plumpness was a distress to her.

"Don't you think I get horribly stout?" she asked Mildred, when she was sitting at tea in the garden presently.

"You may be a little stouter than you were at sixteen, perhaps, but not at all too stout."

"Oh, but I am. I know it, I feel it. Don't endeavour to spare my feelings, aunt. It is useless. I know I am fat. Rosalind says I ought to marry; but I tell her it's absurd. How can anybody ever care for me, now I am fat? They would only want my money if they asked me to marry them," concluded Pamela, clinging to the plural.

"My dear Pamela, do you want me to tell you that you are charming and all that you ought to be?" asked Mildred, laughing.

"Oh, no, no, I don't want you to spare my feelings. Everybody spares one's feelings. One grows up in ignorance of the horrors in one's appearance because people *will* spare one's feel-

ings. And then one sees oneself in a strange glass—or a boy in the street says something, and one knows the worst. I think I know the worst about myself. That is one comfort. How lovely it is here," said Pamela, with a sudden change of mood, glancing at Mildred with a little pathetic look, as she remembered the childish figure that was missing, must be for ever missing, from that home picture. "I am so glad to be with you," she murmured softly, nestling up to Mildred's side, as they sat together on a rustic bench; "let me be useful to you, let me be a companion to you, if you can."

"You shall be both, dear."

"How good to say that. And you won't mind Box?"

"Not the least—if he will be amiable to Kassandra."

"He will. He has been brought up among other dogs. We are a very doggy family at the Hall. Would you think he was worth a hundred and fifty guineas?" asked Pamela with ill-concealed pride, as the scion of illustrious progenitors came up and put his long lean head in her hand, and conversed with her in a series of expressive snorts, as it were a conversational code.

"I hardly know what constitutes perfection in a fox terrier."

"No more do I; but I know he is perfect. He is said to be the image of Cracknel, only better. I tremble when I think that my possession of him hangs by a thread. He might be stolen at any moment."

"You must be careful."

"Yes, I cannot be too careful. Here comes Uncle George," said Pamela, rising and running to meet Mr. Greswold. "Oh, Uncle George, *how* altered you are!"

She was always saying the wrong thing, after the manner of impulsive girls; and she was quick-witted enough to discover her mistake the instant after.

Happily the dogs furnished a ready diversion. She introduced Box, and expatiated upon his grand qualities. She admired and made friends with Kassandra, and then settled down almost as lightly as a butterfly, in spite of her plumpness, on a Japanese stool, to take her teacup from Mildred's hands.

She was perfectly at her ease by this time, and told her uncle and aunt all about her sister Rosalind, and Rosalind's husband, Sir Henry Mountford, whom she summed up lightly as a nice old thing, and no end of fun. It was easy to divine from her discourse that Rainham Hall was not an especially intellectual atmosphere, not a school of advanced thought, or of any other kind of thought. Pamela's talk was of tennis, yachting, fishing and shooting, and of the people who shared in those sports. She seemed to belong to a world in which nobody ever sat down except to eat, or stayed indoors except under stress of weather.

"I hear you have all manner of clever people in your neighbourhood," she said by-and-by, having told all she had to tell about Rainham.

"Have we?" asked Greswold, smiling at her intensity.

"Yes, at Riverdale. They do say the author of '*Nepenthe*' is staying there—and that he is not a Roman cardinal—or an English statesman—but almost a young man—an Italian by birth—and *very* handsome. I would give worlds to see him."

"It is not unlikely you may be gratified without giving anything," answered her uncle. "Mr. Castellani was here yesterday afternoon, and threatened to repeat his visit."

"Castellani! Yes, that is the name I heard. What a pretty name! And what is he like? Do tell me all about him, Aunt Mildred."

She turned to the woman as the more likely to give her a graphic description. The average man is an undescribing animal.

Mildred made an effort at self-command before she spoke. Castellani counted for but little in her recent trouble. His revelation had been an accident, and its effect entirely dissociated from him. Yet the very thought of the man troubled her, and the dread of seeing him again was like a physical pain.

"I do not know what to say about his appearance," she answered presently, slowly fanning herself with a great scarlet Japanese fan, pale and cool looking in her plain white gown with its black ribbons. The very picture of domestic peace, one would suppose, judging by externals only. "I suppose there are people who would think him handsome."

"Don't you, aunt?"

"No. I don't like the colour of his eyes or of his hair. They are of that reddish brown which the Venetian painters are so fond of, but which always gives me an idea of falsehood and treachery. Mr. Castellani is a very clever man, but he is not a man whom I could ever trust."

"How nice," cried Pamela, her face radiant with enthusiasm; "a creature with red-brown hair, and eyes with a depth of falsehood in them. That is just the kind of man who might be the author of '*Nepenthe*.' If you had told me he was stout and rosy-cheeked, with pepper and salt whiskers and a fine, benevolent head, I would never have opened his book again."

"You seem to admire this '*Nepenthe*' prodigiously," said her uncle, looking at her with a calmly critical air. "Is it because the book is the fashion, or from your own unassisted appreciation of it? I did not think you were a bookish person."

"I'm not," cried Pamela. "I am a mass of ignorance. I don't know anything about science. I don't know the name of a single butterfly. I don't know one toad-stool from another. But when I love a book it is a passion with me. My Keats has tumbled to pieces. My Shelley is disgracefully dirty. I have read '*Nepenthe*' six times, and I am waiting for the cheap edition, to keep it under my pillow. It has made me an agnostic."

"Do you know the dictionary meaning of that word?"

"I don't think I do, but I know I am an agnostic. 'Nepenthe' has unsettled all my old beliefs. If I had read it four years ago I should have refused to be confirmed. I am dying to know the author."

"You like unbelievers, then?"

"I adore men who dare to doubt, who are not afraid to stand apart from their fellow men."

"On a bad eminence?"

"Yes, on a bad eminence. What a sweet expression. I can never understand Goethe's Gretchen."

"Why not?"

"How could she have cared for Faust, when she had the privilege of knowing Mephistopheles?"

Pamela Ransome had established herself in her pretty bedroom and dressing-room, and had supervised her maid while she unpacked and arranged all her belongings before dinner time. She came down to the drawing-room at a quarter to eight as thoroughly at her ease as if she had lived half her life at Enderby Manor. She was the kind of visitor who gives no trouble, and who drops into the right place instinctively. Mildred Greswold felt cheered by her presence in spite of that bitter and ever recurrent pang of memory which brought back that other image of the sweet girl-child who should have grown to womanhood under that roof, and who was lying a little way off, under the ripening berries of the mountain ash, and in the deep shadow of a century-old yew.

They were very quiet in the drawing-room after dinner, Greswold reading in a nook apart, by the light of his own particular lamp; his wife bending over an embroidery frame in her corner near the piano, where she had her own special dwarf book-case, and her work-basket, and the *bonheur du jour*, at which she sometimes wrote letters, her own little table scattered with old-family miniatures by Angelica Kaufmann, Cosway and Ross—and antique watches in enamelled cases, and boxes of porcelain and gold and silver, every one of which had its associations and its history. Every woman who lives much at home has some such corner, where the very atmosphere is full of home-thoughts. She asked her niece to play, and to go on playing as long as she liked; and Pamela, pleased with the touch of the fine concert grand, rang the changes upon Chopin, Schumann, Raff and Brahms, choosing those compositions which least jarred upon the atmosphere of studious repose.

Mildred's needle moved slowly, as she sat in her low chair, with her hands in the lamp light and her face in shadow, moved very slowly, and then stopped altogether, and the white hands lay idle in her lap, and the embroidery frame, with its half-finished group of azaleas, slid from her knee to the ground. She was thinking—thinking of that one subject which had possessed her thoughts since yesterday afternoon; which had kept her awake through

the brief darkness of the summer night, and in the slow hours betwixt dawn and the entrance of the maid with the early cup of tea which marked the beginning of the daily routine. In all those hours her thoughts had revolved round that one theme with an intolerable recurrence.

It was of her husband's first marriage she thought, and of his motive for silence about that marriage. That he who, in the whole course of their wedded lives, had been the very spirit of single-minded candour, should yet have suppressed this all-important event in his past history was a fact in itself so startling and mysterious that it might well be the focus of a wife's troubled thoughts. He could not so have acted without some all-sufficient reason; and what manner of reason could that have been which had influenced him to conduct so entirely at variance with his own character?

"I know that he is truthful, high-minded, the soul of honour," she told herself, "and yet there is a tacit falsehood in such a course as he has taken which seems hardly compatible with honour."

What was there in the history of that marriage which had sealed his lips, which made it horrible to him to speak about it, even when fair dealing with the girl who was to be his wife should have constrained frankness?

Had he been cursed with a wicked wife—some beautiful creature who had caught his heart in her toils as a cat catches a bird, and had won him only to betray and to dishonour him? Had she blighted his life, branded him with the shame of a forsaken husband?

And then a hideous dread floated across her mind. What if that first wife were still living—divorced from him! Had she, Mildred Fausset, severely trained in the strictest principles of the Anglican Church—taught her creed by an ascetic who deemed divorce unchristian and an abomination, and who had always refused to marry those who had been divorced—had she, in whose life and mind religion and duty were as one feeling and one principle, had she been trapped into a union with a man whose wife yet lived, and in the sight of God was yet one with him—a wife who might crawl penitent to his feet some day, and claim him as her own again by the right of tears and prayers and a soul cleansed from sin? Such a sinner must have some hold, some claim even to the last upon the man who once was her husband, who once swore to cherish her and cleave to her—of whom it had once been said, "And they two shall be one flesh."

No, again and again no. She could not believe George Greswold capable of such deep dishonour as to have concealed the existence of a divorced wife. No, the reason for that mysterious silence must be another reason than this.

She had sinned against him it might be, and had died in her sin, under circumstances too sad to be told without infinite pain;

and he, who had never in her experience shown himself wanting in moral courage, had in this one crisis of his life acted as the coward acts. He had kept silence where conscience should have constrained him to speak.

And then the wife's vivid fancy conjured up the image of that other wife. Jealous love for the husband depicted that wife of past years as a being to be loved and remembered until death; beautiful, fascinating, gifted with all the qualities that charm mankind, the superior of the second wife. That poor, jealous heart ached with a sick longing to know the worst. "He can never care for me as he once cared for her," Mildred told herself. "She was his first love."

His first; the first revelation of what love means to the passionate heart of youth. What a world there is in that. Mildred remembered how a new life began for her with the awakening of her love for George Greswold. What a strange, sweet enchantment, what an intoxicating gladness which changed and glorified the whole face of nature. The river, and the reedy islets, and the pollard willows, and the autumn sunset—things so simple and familiar had all taken new colours in that magical dawn of her first love.

She—that unknown woman—had been George Greswold's first love. Mildred envied her that brief life, whose sole distinction was to have been loved by him.

"Why do I imagine a mystery about her?" she argued, after long brooding. "The only secret was that he had loved her as he could never love me, and he feared to tell me as much lest I should refuse the remnant of a heart. It was out of kindness to me that he kept silence. It would have pained me too much to know how *she* had been loved."

She knew that her husband was a man of exceeding sensitiveness; she knew him capable of almost womanlike delicacy, intense fear of wounding other people's feelings. Was it altogether unnatural that such a man should have held back the history of his first marriage, with its passionate love, its heart-broken ending, from the enthusiastic girl who had given him all her heart, and to whom he could give so little in return?

"He may have seen how I adored him, and may have married me half out of pity," she said to herself finally, with unspeakable bitterness.

Yet if this were so could they have been so happy together, so completely united—save in that one secret of the past, that one dark regret which had revealed itself from time to time in an agonizing dream? He had walked that dark labyrinth of sleep alone with his sorrow: there she could not follow him.

She remembered the awful sound of those broken sentences—spoken to shadows in a land of shadow. She remembered how acutely she had felt his remoteness as he sat up in bed, pale as

death, his eyes open and fixed, his lips muttering. He and the dead were face to face in the halls of the past. *She* had no part in his life, or in his memory.

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE CANNOT BE UNWORTHY."

MR. CASTELLANI did not wait long before he availed himself of Mrs. Greswold's permission to repeat his visit. He appeared on Friday afternoon, at the orthodox hour of half-past three, when Mildred and her niece were sitting in the drawing-room, exhausted by a long morning at Salisbury, where they had explored the cathedral, and lunched in the Close with a clever friend of George Greswold's, who had made his mark on modern literature.

"I adore Salisbury Close," said Pamela, as she looked through the old-fashioned window to the old-fashioned garden, "it reminds me of Honoria." She did not deem it necessary to explain what Honoria she meant, presuming a universal acquaintance with Coventry Patmore's gentle heroine.

The morning had been sultry, the homeward drive long, and both ladies were resting in comfortable silence, each with a book, when Mr. Castellani was announced.

Mildred received him rather stiffly, trying her uttermost to seem thoroughly at ease. She introduced him to her niece, Miss Ransome.

"The daughter of the late Mr. Gilbert Ransome, and the sister of Lady Mountford?" Castellani inquired presently, when Pamela had run out on the lawn to speak to Box.

"Yes. You seem to know everybody's belongings."

"Why not? It is the duty of every man of the world, more especially of a foreigner. I know Mr. Ransome's place in the Sussex Weald—a very fine property, and I know that the two ladies are co-heiresses, but that the Sussex estate is to descend to the eldest son of the elder daughter, or failing male issue there, to the son of the younger. Lady Mountford has a baby son, I believe."

"Your information is altogether correct."

"Why should it be otherwise? Mr. Hillersdon and his wife discussed the family history to-day at luncheon, apropos to Miss Ransome's appearance in Romsey Church at the Saints' Day service yesterday."

His frankness apologized for his impertinence, and he was a foreigner, which seems always to excuse a great deal.

Pamela came back again, after rescuing Box from a rough-and-tumble game with *Kassandra*. She looked rosy and breathless and very pretty, in her pale-blue gown and girlish sash flying in

the wind, and flaxen hair fluffed into a feathery pile on the top of her head, and honest brown eyes. She resumed her seat in the deep old window behind the end of the piano, and made believe to go on with some work, which she took in a tangled heap from a very untidy basket. Already Pamela had set the sign of her presence upon the drawing-rooms at Enderby, a trail of various litter which was a part of her individuality. Screened by the piano, she was able to observe Castellani, as he stood leaning over the large central ottoman, with his knee on the cushioned seat, talking to Mrs. Greswold.

He was the author of "*Nepenthe*." It was in that character he interested her. She looked at him with the thought of his book full in her mind. It was one of those half mad, wholly artificial compositions which delight girls and young men, and which are just clever enough, and have just enough originality to get talked about and written about by the cultured few. It was a love story, ending tragically—a story of ruined lives and broken hearts, told in the autobiographical form; with a careful disregard of all conventional ornament, which gave an air of reality where all was inherently false. Pamela thought it must be Castellani's own story. She fancied she could see the traces of those heart-breaking experiences, those crushing disappointments, in his countenance, in his bearing even, and in the tones of his voice, which gave an impression of mental fatigue, as of a man worn out by a fatal passion.

The story of "*Nepenthe*" was as old as the hills—or at least as old as the Boulevard des Capucines and the Palais Royal. It was the story of a virtuous young man's love for an unvirtuous woman—the story of Demetrius and Lamia—the story of a man's demoralization under the influence of incarnate falsehood, of the gradual lapse from good to evil, the gradual extinction of every belief and every scruple, the final destruction of a soul.

The wicked syren was taken, her victim was left: but left to expiate that miserable infatuation by an after-life of musing; left without a joy in the present or a hope in the future.

"He looks like it," thought Pamela, remembering that final chapter.

Mrs. Greswold was putting a few slow stitches into the azalea leaves on her embroidery frame, and listening to Mr. Castellani with an air of polite indifference.

"Do you know that Riverdale is quite the most delightful house I have ever stayed in?" he said; "and I have stayed in a great many. And do you know that Mrs. Hillersdon is heart-broken at your never having called upon her?"

"I am sorry so small a matter should touch Mrs. Hillersdon's heart."

"She feels it intensely. She told me so yesterday. Perfect candour is one of the charms of her character. She is as emotional

and as transparent as a child. Why have you not called on her?"

"You forget that Riverdale is seven miles from this house."

"Does not your charity extend so far? Are people who live seven miles off beyond the pale? I think you must visit a little further afield than seven miles. There must be some other reason."

"There is another reason, which I had rather not talk about."

"I understand. You consider Mrs. Hillersdon a person not to be visited. Long ago, when you were a child in the nursery, Mrs. Hillersdon was an undisciplined, inexperienced girl, and the world used her hardly. Is that old history never to be forgotten? Men, who know it all, have agreed to forget it: why should women, who only know a fragment, so obstinately remember?"

"I know nothing and remember nothing about Mrs. Hillersdon. My friends are for the most part those of my husband's choice, and I pay no visits without his approval. He does not wish me to visit at Riverdale. You have forced me to give a plain answer, Mr. Castellani."

"Why not? Plain truth is always best. I am sorry Mr. Greswold has interdicted my charming friend. You can have no idea how excellent a woman she is, or how admirable a wife. Tom Hillersdon might have searched the county from border to border and not have found as good a woman—looked at as the woman best calculated to make him happy. And what delightful people she has brought about him. One of the most interesting men I ever met arrived yesterday, and is to preach the hospital sermon at Romsey next Sunday. He is an old friend of yours."

"A clergyman, and an old friend of mine, at Riverdale?"

"A man of ascetic life and extraordinary culture. I never heard any man talk of Dante better than he talked to me last night in a moonlight stroll on the terrace, while the other men were in the smoking-room."

"Surely you do not mean Mr. Cancellor, the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street."

"That is the man. Clement Cancellor, Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He looks like a mediæval monk, just stepped out of one of Perrugini's altar pieces."

"He is the noblest, most unselfish of men; he has given his life to doing good among rich and poor. It is so long since I have seen him. We have asked him to Enderby very often, but he has always been too busy to come. And to think that he should be coming to this neighbourhood and I know nothing about it; and to think that he should go to Riverdale rather than come here!"

"He had hardly any option. It was Mrs. Hillersdon who asked him to preach on Hospital Sunday. She extorted a promise from him three months ago in London. The Vicar of

Romsey was enchanted. 'You are the cleverest woman I know,' he said. 'No one else could have got me such a great gun.'

'A great gun—Mr. Cancellor a great gun! I can only think of him as I knew him when I was twelve years old, a tall, thin young man in a very shabby coat—he was curate at St. Elizabeth's then—very gaunt and hollow-cheeked, but with such a sweet smile. He used to come twice a week to teach me the history of the Bible and the Church. He made me love both.'

'He is gaunt and hollow-cheeked still, very tall and bony and sallow, and he still wears a shabby coat. You will not find much difference in him I fancy—only so many more years of hard work and self-sacrifice, ascetic living and nightly study. A man to know Dante as he does must have given years of his life to that one poet—and I am told that in literature Cancellor is an all-round man. His monograph on Pascal is said to be the best of a brilliant series of such studies.'

'I hope he will come to see his old pupil before he leaves the neighbourhood.'

'He means to do so. He was talking of it yesterday evening—asking Mrs. Hillersdon if she was intimate with you—so awkward for poor Mrs. Hillersdon.'

'I shall be very glad to see him again,' said Mildred gently.

'May I drive him over to tea to-morrow afternoon?'

'He will be welcome here at any time.'

'Or with any one? If Mrs. Hillersdon were to bring him, would you still refuse to receive her?'

'I have never refused to receive her. We have met and talked to each other on public occasions. If Mr. Cancellor likes her she cannot be unworthy.'

'May she come with him to-morrow?' persisted Castellani.

'If she likes,' faltered Mildred, wondering that any woman could so force an entrance to another woman's house.

She did not know that it was by such entrances Mrs. Hillersdon had made her way in society, until half the best houses in London had been opened to her.

'If you are not in a hurry to leave us, I know my niece would much like to hear you play,' she said, feeling that the talk about Riverdale had been dull work for Pamela.

Miss Ransome murmured assent.

'If you will play something of Beethoven's,' she entreated.

'Do you object to Mozart?' he asked, forgetting his depreciation of the valet-musician's son a few days before. 'I feel more in the humour for that prince of dramatists. I will give you the supper in 'Don Giovanni.' You shall see Leporello trembling. You shall hear the tramp of ghostly feet.'

And then, improvising upon a familiar theme, he gave his own version of that wonderful scene, and that music so played

conjured up a picture as vivid as ever playhouse furnished to an enthralled audience.

Pamela listened in silent rapture. What a God-gifted creature this was, who had so deeply moved her by his pen, who moved her even more intensely by that magical touch upon the piano.

When he had played those last crashing chords which consigned the profligate to his doom, he waited for a minute or so, and then, softly, as if almost unawares, in mere absent-minded idleness, his hands wandered into the staccato accompaniment of the serenade, and with the finest tenor Mildred had heard since she heard Sims Reeves, he sang those delicate and dainty phrases with which the seducer woos his last divinity.

He rose from the piano at the close of that lovely air, smiling at his hearers.

"I had no idea that you were a singer as well as a pianist," said Mildred.

"You forget that music is my native tongue. My father taught me to play before he taught me to read, and I knew harmony before I knew my alphabet. I was brought up in the house of a man who lived only for music—to whom all stringed instruments were as his mother tongue. It was by a caprice that he made me play the piano—which he rarely touched himself."

"He must have been a great genius," said Pamela, with girlish fervour.

"Alas! no, he just missed greatness, and he just missed genius. He was a highly-gifted man—various—capricious—volatile—and he married a woman with just enough money to ruin him. Had he been obliged to earn his bread, he might have been great. Who can say? Hunger is the slave driver with his whip of steel, who peoples the Valhalla of nations. If Homer had not been a beggar—as well as blind—we might have had no 'Tale of Troy.' Good-bye, Mrs. Greswold. Good-bye," shaking hands with Pamela. "I *may* bring my hostess to-morrow?"

"I—I—suppose so," Mildred answered feebly, wondering what her husband would think of such an invasion.

Yet, if Clement Cancellor, who to Mildred's mind had seemed ever the ideal Priest of Christ, if he could tolerate and consort with her, could she, Mildred Greswold, persist in the Pharisee's part, and hold herself aloof from this neighbour, to whose good works and kindly disposition many voices had testified?

CHAPTER XIII.

SHALL SHE BE LESS THAN ANOTHER?

It was in all good faith that Clement Cancellor had gone to Riverdale. He had not gone there for the fleshpots of Egypt

He was a man of severely ascetic habits, who ate and drank as temperately as a disciple of that old faith of the east which is gaining a curious influence upon our new life of the west. For him the gratification of the senses, soft raiment, artistic furniture, thorough-bred horses and luxurious carriages, palm-houses and orchid-houses, offered no temptation. He stayed in Mrs. Hillersdon's house because he was her friend, her friend upon the broadest and soundest basis on which friendship could be built. He knew all that was to be known about her. He knew her frailties of the past, her virtues in the present, her exalted hope in the future. From her own lips he had heard the story of Louise Lorraine's life. She had extenuated nothing. She had not withheld from him either the magnitude of her sins or their number—nay it may be that she had in some wise exaggerated the blackness of those devils, whom he, Clement Cancellor, had cast out from her, enhancing by just so much the magnitude of the work he had wrought. She had held back nothing; but over every revelation she had contrived to spread that gloss which a clever woman knows how to give to the tale of her own wrongdoing. In every incident of that evil career she had contrived to show herself more sinned against than sinning; the fragile victim of over-mastering wickedness in others; the martyr of man's treachery and man's passion; the sport of fate and circumstance. Had Mr. Cancellor known the world he lived in half as well as he knew the world beyond he would hardly have believed so readily in the lady who had been Louise Lorraine; but he was too single-minded to doubt a repentant sinner whose conversion from the ways of evil had been made manifest by so many good works, and such unflagging zeal in the exercises of the Anglican Church.

Parchment Street, Grosvenor Square, is one of the fashionable streets of London, and St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street, had gradually developed, in Clement Cancellor's incumbency, into one of the most popular temples at the West End of London. He whose life-desire had been to carry the lamp of the faith into dark places, to be the friend and teacher of the friendless and the untaught, found himself almost in spite of himself a fashionable preacher, and the delight of the highly cultured, the wealthy and the aristocratic. In his parish of St. Elizabeth's there was plenty of work for him to do—plenty of that work which he had chosen as the mission that had been given to him to fulfil. Behind those patrician streets where only the best-appointed carriages drew up, where only the best-dressed footmen ever pulled the bells or rattled long peals upon high-art knockers, there were some of the worst slums in London, and it was in those slums that half Mr. Cancellor's life was spent. In narrow alleys between Oxford and Wigmore Streets, in the intricate purlieus of Marylebone Lane the Anglican priest had ample scope for his labour, a field offering free play to the husbandman. And in the labyrinth

hidden in the heart of West-end London Mr. Cancellor's chief coadjutor for the last twenty years had been Louise Hillersdon. Thoroughness was the supreme quality of Mrs. Hillersdon's mind. Nothing stopped her. It was this temper which had given her distinction in the days when princes were her cup-bearers and diamonds her daily tribute. There had been other women as beautiful, other women as fascinating; but there was not one who with beauty and fascination combined the reckless audacity and the indomitable resolution of Louise Lorraine. When Louise Lorraine took possession of a man's wits and a man's fortune that man was doomed. He was as completely gone as the lemon in the iron squeezer. A twist of the machine, and there is nothing left but broken rind and crushed pulp. A season of infatuation, and there was nothing left of Mrs. Lorraine's admirer but shattered health and an overdrawn banking account. Estates, houses, friends, position, good name, all had vanished from the man whom Louise Lorraine ground in her mortar. She spoke of him next season with half contemptuous pity. "Did I know Sir John Barrymore? Yes; he used to come to my parties sometimes. A nice fellow enough, but such a terrible fool."

When Louise Lorraine married Tom Hillersdon, and took it into her head to break away altogether from her past career, to pose before the world as a beautiful Magdalen, she was clever enough to know that to achieve any place in society, she must have a very powerful influence to help her. She was clever enough to discover that the one influence which a woman in her position could count upon was the influence of the Church. She was beautiful enough and refined enough to win friends among the clergy by the charm of her personality. She was rich enough to secure such friends, and bind them to herself by the splendour of her gifts, by her substantial aid in those good works which are to the priest as the very breath of his life. One man she could win by an organ; another lived only to complete a steeple; the third had been yearning for a decade for that golden hour when the cracked tintinabulation which now summoned his flock should be exchanged for the music of a fine peal of bells. Such men as these were only too easily won, and the drawing-rooms of the great house in Park Lane were rarely without the grace of some priestly figure in long frock coat and Roman collar.

Clement Cancellor was of a sterner stuff, and not to be bought by bell or reredos, rood-screen or pulpit. Him Louise Hillersdon won by larger measures: to him she offered all that was spiritual and aspiring in her nature, and this woman of strange memories was not without spiritual aspirations and real striving after godliness. Clement Cancellor was no pious simpleton, to be won by studied hypocries and crocodile tears. He knew truth from falsehood, had never in his life been duped by the jingle of false coin. He knew that Mrs. Hillersdon's repentance had the true

ring, albeit she was in some things still of the earth, earthy. She had worked for him and with him in that wilderness of London as not one other woman in his congregation had ever worked. To the lost of her own sex she had been as a redeeming angel. Wretched women had blessed her with their expiring breath, had died full of hopes that might never have been kindled had not Louise Lorraine sat beside their beds. Few other women had ever so influenced the erring of her sex. She who had waded deep in the slough of sin knew how to talk to these sinners.

Mr. Cancellor never forgot her as he had seen her by the bed of death and in the haunts of iniquity. She could never be to him as the herd of women. To the mind of the Preacher she had a higher value than one in twenty of those women of his flock whose unstained lives had never needed the cleansing of self sacrifice and difficult works.

Thus it was that the vicar of St. Elizabeth's had never shrunk from acknowledging Mrs. Hillersdon as his personal friend, had never feared to sit at her board, or to be seen with her in public; and in the work of Louise Lorraine's rehabilitation Mr. Cancellor was a tower of strength. And now this latest mark of friendship, this visit to her country home, and this appearance in the noble old Abbey Church at her solicitation, filled her cup of pride. These starched county people who had shunned her hospitalities were to see that one of the most distinguished preachers in the High Church party had given her his friendship and his esteem.

It had been something for her to have had the Prince at Riverdale: it was still more to her to have Clement Cancellor.

Pamela was in a flutter of excitement all Saturday morning, in the expectation of Castellani's reappearance in the afternoon. She had heard Mr. Cancellor preach, and was delighted at the idea of seeing him in the pleasant intimacy of afternoon tea. Had there been no such person as Castellani, her spirits would have been on tip-toe at the idea of conversing with the fashionable preacher—of telling him in hushed and reverent tones of all those deep emotions his eloquence had inspired in her. But the author of "*Nepenthe*" possessed just that combination of gifts and qualities which commands the admiration of such a girl as Pamela. That exquisite touch on the piano, that perfect tenor voice, that semi-exotic elegance of dress and figure, all had made their mark upon the sensitive plate of a girl's ardent fancy. "If I had pictured to myself the man who wrote '*Nepenthe*,' I should have imagined just such a face, just such a style," thought Pamela, quite forgetting that when first she had read the book she had made a very vivid picture of the author altogether the opposite of César Castellani—a dark man, lean as a whipping post, grave as philosophy itself, with sombre black eyes, and ebon hair, and a complexion of antique marble. And now she was

ready to accept the Italian, sleek, supple, essentially modern in every grace and attribute, in place of that sage of antique mould.

She went dancing about with the dogs all the morning, inciting the grave Kassandra to unwonted exertions, running in and out of the drawing-room, making an atmosphere of life and gaiety in the grave old house. Mildred's heart ached as she watched that flying figure in the white gown, youth, health, joyousness personified.

"Oh, if my darling were but here, life might be full of happiness again," she thought. "I should cease to weary myself with wondering about that hidden past."

Do what she would her thoughts still dwelt upon the image of that wife who had possessed George Greswold's heart before her. She knew that he must have loved that other woman whom he had sworn before God's altar to cherish. He was not the kind of man to marry for any motive but a disinterested love. That he had loved passionately, and that he had been wronged deeply, was Mildred's reading of the mystery. There had been a look of agony in his countenance when he spoke of the past that told of a sorrow too deep for words.

"He has never loved me as he once loved her," thought Mildred, who out of the wealth of her own love had developed the capacity for that self-torture called jealousy.

It seemed to her that her husband had taken pains to avoid the old opportunities of confidential talk since that revelation of last Sunday. He had been more than usually engaged by the business details of his estate; and she fancied that he made the most of all those duties which he used once to perform with the utmost despatch, grudging every hour that was spent away from the home circle. He now complained of the new steward's ignorance, which threw so much extra work upon himself.

"After jogging on for years in the same groove with a man who knew every inch of the estate and every tenant, I find it hard work teaching a new man," he told his wife.

This sounded reasonable enough, yet she could but think that since Sunday he had taken pains to avoid being alone with her. If he asked her to drive or walk with him, he secured Pamela's company before the excursion was planned.

"We must show you the country," he said.

Mildred told him of the threatened incursion from Riverdale as they sat at luncheon with Pamela.

"I hope you don't mind my receiving Mrs. Hillersdon," she said.

"No, my dear, I think it would take a much worse woman than Mrs. Hillersdon to do you any harm, or Pamela either, I hope. Whatever her early history may have been, she has made Tom Hillersdon an excellent wife, and she has been a very good friend to the poor. I should not have cared for you to cultivate Mrs. Hillersdon, or the society she brings round her at Riverdale——"

"Sir Henry says they have people from the music halls," interjected Pamela in an awe-stricken voice.

"But if Mrs. Hillersdon likes to come here with her clerical star——"

"Don't call him a star, George. He is highly gifted, and people have chosen, to make him the fashion, but he is the most single-hearted and simple-minded man I ever met. No popularity could spoil him. I feel that if he holds out the hand of friendship to Mrs. Hillersdon she must be a good woman."

"Let her come, Mildred, only don't let her coming open the door to intimacy. I would not have my wife the friend of any woman with a history."

"And yet there are histories in most lives, George, and there is sometimes a mystery."

She could not refrain from this little touch of bitterness, yet she was sorry the instant she had spoken, deeply sorry, when she saw the look of pain in the darkly thoughtful face opposite to her. Why should she wilfully wound him, purposelessly, needlessly, she who so fondly loved him, whose keenest pain was to think that he had loved any woman upon earth before he loved her?

"You will be at home to help me to receive my old friend, George," she said as they rose from the table.

"Yes, I will be at home to welcome Cancellor, and to guard you from his *protégée's* influence, if I can."

They were all three in the drawing-room when the Riverdale party arrived. Mildred and Mrs. Hillersdon met in some wise as old acquaintances, having been thrown together on numerous occasions at hunt balls, charity bazaars, and other public assemblies. Pamela was the only stranger.

Although the romance and the scandal of Louise Lorraine's career was called ancient history, she was still a beautiful woman. The delicate features, the pure tones of the alabaster skin, and the large Irish grey eyes had been kindly dealt with by Time. On the verge of fifty, Mrs. Hillersdon might have owned only to forty, had she cared so far to palter with truth. Her charm was, however, now more in a fascinating personality than in the remains of a once dazzling loveliness. There was mind in the keen, bright face, with its sharply-cut lines, and those traces of intellectual wear which give a new grace, instead of the old one of soft and youthful roundness and faultless colouring. The bloom was gone from the peach, the brilliancy of youth had faded from those speaking eyes, but there was all the old sweetness of expression which had made Louise Lorraine's smile irresistible as the song of the Lurlei in the days that were gone. Her dress was perfect, as it had always been from the days when she threw away her last cotton stocking, darned by her own fair hands, and took to dressing like a princess of the blood royal, and with per-

haps even less concern for cost. She dressed in perfect harmony with her age and position. Her gown was of softest black silk, draped with some semi-diaphanous fabric and clouded with Chantilly lace. Her bonnet was of the same lace and gauze, and her long thin hand was fitted to perfection in a black glove which met a cloud of lace just below the elbow.

At a period when almost every woman who wore black glittered with beads and bangles from head to foot, Mrs. Hillersdon's costume was unembellished by a single ornament. The Parisian milliner had known how to obey her orders to the letter when she stipulated *surtout point de jais*; and the effect was at once distinguished and refined.

Clement Cancellor greeted his old pupil with warm friendliness, and meekly accepted her reproaches for all those invitations which he had refused in the past ten years.

"You told me so often that it was impossible, and yet you can go to my neighbour," she said.

"My dear Mildred, I went to Riverdale because I was wanted at Romsey."

"And do you think you were not wanted at Romsey before to-day—do you think we should not have been proud to have you preach in our church here? People would have flocked from far and wide to hear you—yes, even to Enderby Church—and you might have aided some good work, as you are going to do to-morrow. How clever of Mrs. Hillersdon to know how to tempt you down here."

"You may be sure it is not the first time I have tried, Mrs. Greswold," said the lady with her fascinating smile. "Your influence would have gone further than mine had you taken as much trouble as I have done."

Mr. Rollinson, the curate of Enderby, was announced at this moment. The vicar was a rich man with another parish in his cure, and his own comfortable Vicarage and his brother's family mansion being adjacent to the other church, Enderby saw him but seldom, and Mr. Rollinson was a person of much more weight in the parish than the average clerical subaltern. Mildred liked him for his plain-sailing Christianity and unfailing kindness to the poor, and she had asked him to tea this afternoon, knowing that he would like to meet Clement Cancellor.

Castellani looked curiously unlike those three other men, with their grave countenances and unstudied dress: George Greswold roughly clad in shooting-jacket and knickerbockers; the two priests in well-worn black. The Italian made a spot of brightness in that sombre assembly, the sunlight touching his hair and moustache with glints of gold, his brown velvet coat and light grey trousers suggestive of the studio rather than of rustic lanes, a gardenia in his button-hole, a valuable old intaglio for his scarf-pin, and withal a half-insolent look of amusement at those two

priests and the sombre-visaged master of the house. He slipped with serpentine grace to the further side of the piano, where he contrived his first *tete-a-tete* with Pamela, comfortably sheltered by the great Henri Deux vase of gloxinias on the instrument.

Pamela was shy at first, and would hardly speak; then taking courage, told him how she had wondered and wept over "Nepenthe," and they talked as if they were two kindred souls that had been kept too long apart by adverse fate, and thrilled with the new delight of union.

Round the tea-table the conversation was of a graver cast. After a general discussion of the threatening clouds upon the political and ecclesiastical horizon, the talk had drifted to a question which at this time was very much in the minds of men. The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill had been thrown out by the Upper House during the last session, and everybody had been talking of that debate in which three princes of the blood royal had been attentive auditors. They had recorded their vote on the side of liberty of conscience, but in vain. Time-honoured prejudices had prevailed against modern enlightenment.

Clement Cancellor was a man who would have suffered martyrdom for his faith; he was generous, he was merciful, gentle, self-sacrificing, pure in spirit; but he was not liberal minded. The old shackles hung heavily upon him. He could not forgive Wycliffe, and he could not love Latimer. He was an ecclesiastic after the antique pattern. To him the marriage of a priest was a base paltering with the lusts of the flesh; and to him a layman's marriage with a dead wife's sister was unholy and abominable. He had been moved to indignation by the words that had been spoken and the pamphlets that had been written of late upon this question, and now, carried away by George Greswold's denunciation of that prejudiced majority by which the bill had been rejected, Mr. Cancellor gave his indignation full vent, and forgot that he was speaking in a lady's drawing-room and before feminine hearers.

He spoke of such marriages as unholy and immoral; he spoke of such households as accursed. Mildred listened to him, and watched him wonderingly, scared at this revelation of an unknown side of his character. To her he had ever been the gentlest of teachers; she saw him now pallid with wrath—she heard him breathing words of fire.

George Greswold took up the glove, not because he had ever felt any particular interest in this abstract question of canonical law, but because he hated narrow-minded opinions and clerical prejudices.

"Why should the sister of his wife be different to a man from all other women? You may call her different—you may set her apart—you may say she must be to him as his own sister—her beauty must not touch him, the charms that fascinate other

men must have no influence over him. You may lay this down as a law—civil—canonical—what you will—but the common law of nature will override your clerical code, will burst your shackles of prejudice and tradition. Shall Rachel be withheld from him who was true and loyal to Leah? She has dwelt in his house as his friend, the favourite and playmate of his children. He has respected her as he would have respected any other of his wife's girl-friends; but he has seen that she was fair; and if God takes the wife, and he, remembering the sweetness of that old friendship, and his children's love, turns to her as the one woman who can give him back his lost happiness, rekindle the sacred fire of the domestic hearth—is he to be told that this one woman can never be his, because she was the sister of his first chosen? She has come out of the same stock whose loyalty he has proved, she would bring to his hearth all the old sweet associations ——”

“And she would *not* bring him a second mother-in-law. What a stupendous superiority she would have *there*,” interjected the jovial Rollinson, who had been wallowing in hot-buttered cakes and strong tea, until his usually roseate visage had become startlingly rubicund.

He was in all things the opposite of the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He wrote poetry, made puns, played billiards, dined out at all the houses in the neighbourhood that were worth dining at, and was only waiting to marry until Tom Hillersdon should be able to give him a living.

Mr. Cancellor reproved the ribald jester with a scathing look, before he took up the argument against his host.

“If this bill were to pass, no virtuous woman could live in the house of a married sister,” he said.

“That is as much as to say that no honest woman can live in the house of any married man,” retorted Greswold hotly. “Do you think if a man is weak enough to fall in love with another woman under his wife's roof he is less likely to succumb to her fascinations because your canonical law stares him in the face telling him, ‘Thou can'st never wed her.’ The married man who is false to his wife is not influenced by the chances of the future. He is either a bold, bad man whose only thought is to win the woman whom he loves at any cost of honour or conscience, or he is a weak fool who drifts hopelessly to destruction, and in whom the resolution of to-day yields to the temptation of to-morrow. Neither type is influenced one jot by the consideration whether he can or cannot marry the woman he loves under the unlikely circumstance of his wife's untimely death. The man who does so calculate is the one man in so many thousands of men who, as statistics may show, will poison his wife to clear the way for his new fancy. I don't think we ought to legislate for poisoners. In plain words, if a married man is weak enough or wicked enough to be seduced from his allegiance by the charms of any

woman that dwells beneath his roof, he will not be the less likely to fall because the law of the land has made that woman anathema maranatha, or because he has been warned from the pulpit that she is to be to him as his own flesh and blood, no dearer and no less dear than the sister whose rosy lips cleaved to his when he was in his cradle, beside whom he grew from infancy to manhood, and whom he has loved all his life, hardly knowing whether she is as lovely as Hebe or as ugly as Tisiphone."

"You are a disciple of the New Learning, Mr. Greswold," Cancellor said bitterly; "the learning which breaks down all barriers and annihilates the Creator of all things—the learning which has degraded God from infinite power to infinitesimal insignificance, and which explains the genius of Plato and Shakespeare, Luther and Newton, as the ultimate outcome of an unconscious primeval mist."

"I am no Darwinian," replied Greswold coldly, "but I would rather belong to his school of speculative inquiry than to the Calvinism which slew Servetus, or the Roman Catholicism which kindled the death-pile of the Oxford martyrs."

Mildred was not more anxious than Mrs. Hillersdon to end a discussion which threatened angry feeling. They looked at each other in an agony, and then with a sudden inspiration Mildred exclaimed :

"If we could only persuade Mr. Castellani to play to us. We are growing so terribly serious," and then she went to Clement Cancellor, who was standing by the open window, and took her place beside him while Mrs. Hillersdon talked with Pamela and Castellani at the piano. "You know what a privilege it is to *me* always to hear you talk," she murmured in her sweet, subdued voice. "You know how I have followed your teaching in all things. And be assured my husband is no materialist. We both cling to the old faith, the old hopes, the old promises. You must not misjudge him because of a single difference of opinion."

"Forgive me, my dear Mildred," replied Cancellor, touched by her submission. "I did wrong to be angry. I know that to many good Christians this question of marriage with a sister-in-law is a stumbling block. I have taken the subject too deeply to heart perhaps—I to whom marriage altogether seems outside the Christian priest's horizon. Perhaps I may exaggerate the peril of a wider liberty; but I, who look upon Henry VIII. as the arch-enemy of the one vital Church—of which he might have been the wise and enlightened reformer—I who trace to his unhallowed union with his brother's widow all the after evils of his career—must needs lift up my voice against a threatened danger."

A crash of mighty chords began Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and sounded like a touch of irony. Do what the preacher

might to assimilate earth to Heaven, here there would still be marrying and giving in marriage.

After the march Mildred went over to the piano and asked Castellani to sing.

He bowed a silent assent, and played the brief symphony to a ballad of Heine's, set by Jensen. The exquisite tenor voice, the perfect taste of the singer, held every one spellbound. They listened in silence, and entreated him to sing again, and then again, till he had sung four of these jewel-like ballads, and they felt that it was impertinence to ask for more.

Mildred had stolen round to her own sheltered corner, half hidden by a group of tall palms. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head bent. She could not see the singer. She only heard the low pathetic voice, slightly veiled. It touched her like no other voice that she had ever heard since in her girlhood she burst into a passion of sobs at the opening phrase of Sims Reeves' "Come into the garden, Maud," just those seven notes, touching some hyper-sensitive chord in her own organization and moving her almost to hysteria. And now in this voice of the man whom of all other men she instinctively disliked the same tones touched the same chord, and loosened the floodgates of her tears. She sat with streaming eyes, grateful for the sheltering foliage which screened her from observation.

She dried her eyes and recovered herself with difficulty when the singer arose from the piano and Mrs. Hillersdon began to take leave. Rollinson, the curate, button-holed Castellani on the instant.

"You sing as if you had just come from the seraphic choir," he said. "You must sing for us next Friday week."

"Who are 'us'?" asked Castellani.

"Our concert in aid of the fund for putting a Burne-Jones window over the altar."

"A concert in Enderby village? Is it to be given at the lock-up or in the pound?"

"It is to be given in this room. Mrs. Greswold has been good enough to allow us the use of her drawing-room and her piano. Miss Ransome promises to preside at the buffet for tea and coffee."

"It will be glorious fun," exclaimed Pamela. "I shall feel like a barmaid. I have always envied barmaids."

"Daudet says there is one effulgent spot in every man's life—one supreme moment when he stands on the mountain top of fortune and of bliss, and from which all the rest of his existence is a gradual descent. I wonder whether that afternoon will be your effulgent spot, Miss Ransome?" said Mrs. Hillersdon laughingly.

"It will—it must. To superintend two great urns of tea and coffee—almost as nice as those delicious beer engines one sees at Salisbury Station—to charge people a shilling for a small cup

of tea, and sixpence for a penny sponge cake. What splendid fun!"

"Will you help us, Mr. Castleton?" asked the curate, who was not good at names.

"Mrs. Greswold has only to command me. I am in all things her slave."

"Then she will command you—she does command you," cried the curate.

"If you will be so very kind——" began Mildred.

"I am only too proud to obey you," answered Castellani, with more earnestness than the occasion required, drawing a little nearer to Mildred as he spoke, "only too glad of an excuse to return to this house."

Mildred looked at him with a half-frightened expression, and then glanced at Pamela. Did he mean mischief of some kind? Was this the beginning of an insidious pursuit of that frank, open-hearted girl, who was an heiress of quite sufficient mark to tempt the casual adventurer?

"Of all men I have ever seen he is the last to whom I would entrust a girl's fate," thought Mildred, determined to be very much on her guard against the blandishments of César Castellani.

She took the very worst means to ward off danger. She made the direful mistake of warning the girl against the possible pursuer.

"He is a man I could never trust," she said.

"No more could I," replied Pamela; "but oh, how exquisitely he sings!" and, excited at the mere memory of that singing, she ran to the piano and began to pick out the melody of Heine's "*Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten*," and sang the words softly in her girlish voice; and then slipped away from the piano with a nervous little laugh.

"Upon my word, Aunt Mildred, I am *traurig* myself at the very thought of that exquisite song," she said. "What a gift it is to be able to sing like that. How I wish I were César Castellani!"

"What, when we have both agreed that he is not a good man?"

"Who cares about being *good*?" exclaimed Pamela, beside herself; "three-fourths of the people of this world are good. But to be able to write a book that can unsettle every one's religion; to be able to make everybody miserable when one sings! Those are gifts that place a man on a level with the Greek gods. If I were Mr. Castellani I should feel like Mercury or Apollo."

"Pamela, you frighten me when you rave like that. Remember that for all we know to the contrary this man may be a mere adventurer, and in every way dangerous."

"Why should we think him an adventurer? He told me all about himself. He told me that his grandfather was under obligations to your grandfather. He told me about his father, the

composer, who wrote operas which are known all over Italy, and who died young, like Mozart and Mendelssohn. Genius is hereditary with him; he was suckled upon art. I have no doubt he is bad, irretrievably bad," said Pamela, with unction; "but don't try to persuade me that he is a vulgar adventurer who would try to borrow five-pound notes, or a fortune-hunter who would try to marry one for one's money," concluded the girl, falling back upon her favourite form of speech.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFTING THE CURTAIN.

THE charity concert afforded César Castellani just the necessary excuse for going to Enderby Manor House as often as he liked, and for staying there as long as he liked. He was now on a familiar footing. He drove, or rode over from Riverdale nearly every day in the three weeks that intervened between Mr. Cancellor's sermon and the afternoon concert. He made himself the curate's right hand in all the details of the entertainment. He chose the music, he wrote the programme, he sent it to his favourite printer to be printed in antique type upon ribbed paper, a perfect gem in the way of a programme. He scoured the country round in quest of amateur talent, and was much more successful than the curate had been in the same kind of quest.

"I'm astounded at your persuading Lady Millborough to show in the daylight," said Mr. Rollinson, laughing. "You must have exercised the tongue of the serpent to overcome her objection to the glare of the afternoon sun."

"*Estote prudentes sicuti serpentes*," said Castellani. "There's a fine old ecclesiastic's motto for you. I know Lady Millborough rather dreads the effect of sunlight upon her *nacre Bernhardt*. She told me that she was never equal to singing in the afternoon: the glare of the sun always gave her a headache. But I assured her in the first place that there should be no sun-glare—that as an artist I abhorred a crude, white light—and that it should be my business to see that our concert room was lighted upon purely artistic principles. We would have the dim religious light which painters and poets love; and in the second place I assured her that she had as fine a contralto as Madame Alboni, on whose knees I had often sat as a child, and who gave me the emerald pin I was wearing."

"My hat, what a man you are!" exclaimed Rollinson. "But do you mean to say we are to give our concert in the dark?"

"We will not have the afternoon sunshine blinding half our audience. We will have the auditorium in a cool twilight, and

we will have lamplight on our platform—just that mellow and flattering light in which elderly women look young and young women angelic.”

“We’ll leave everything to you,” cried the curate. “I think we ought to leave him free scope, ought we not, Mrs. Greswold?”

Mildred assented. Pamela was enthusiastic. This concert was to be one of the events of her life. Castellani had discovered that she possessed a charming mezzo soprano. She was to sing a duet with him. Oh, what rapture, a duet of his own composition, all about roses and love and death!

“ ’Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
If I had but lived for thee;
Yes, a life as long as the nightingale’s song
Were enough for my heart and me.”

The words and the voices were interwoven in a melodious web; tenor and soprano entwined together—always beginning again like the phrases in an anthem.

The preparation of this one duet alone obliged Mr. Castellani to be nearly every day at Enderby. A musician generally has inexhaustible patience in teaching his own music. Castellani hammered at every bar and every note with Pamela. He did not hesitate at unpleasant truths. She had received the most expensive instruction from a well-known singing master, and according to Castellani everything she had been taught was wrong. “If you had been left alone to sing as the birds sing you would be ever so much better off,” he said; “the man has murdered a very fine organ. If I had had the teaching of you, you would have sung as well as Trebelli by this time.”

Pamela thrilled at the thought. Oh, to sing like some great singer—to be able to soar skyward on the wings of music—to sing as *he* sang! She had known him a fortnight by this time, and was deeply in love with him. In moments of confidence by the piano he called her Pamela, treating her almost as if she were a child; yet with a touch of gallantry always—an air that said: “You are beautiful, dear child, and you know it—but I have lived my life.” Before Mrs. Greswold he was more formal, and called her Miss Ransome.

All barriers were down now between Riverdale and the Manor. Mrs. Hillersdon was going to make an extra large house-party on purpose to patronize the concert. It was to be on the 7th of September. The partridge shooting would be in full swing, and the shooters assembled. Mrs. Greswold had been to tea at Riverdale. There seemed to be no help for it, and George Greswold was apparently indifferent.

“My dearest, your purity of mind will be in no danger from Mrs. Hillersdon—even were she still Louise Lorraine, she could

not harm you—and you know I am not given to consider the *qu'en dira-t-on?* in such a case. Let her come here by all means, so long as she is not obnoxious to you."

"She is far from that. I think she has the most delightful manners of any woman I ever met."

"So no doubt had Circe; yet she changed men into swine."

"Mr. Cancellor would not believe in her if she were not a good woman."

"I should set a higher value on Mr. Cancellor's opinion if he were more of a man of the world, and less of a bigot. See what nonsense he talked about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill."

"Nonsense! Oh, George, if you knew how it distressed me to hear you take the other side—the unchristian side."

"I can find no word of Christ's against such marriages, and the Church of old was always ready with a dispensation for any such union, if it was made worth the Church's while to be indulgent. You are Cancellor's pupil, Mildred, and I cannot wonder if he has made you something of a bigot."

"He is the noblest and most unselfish of men."

"I admit his unselfishness—the purity of his intentions—the tenderness of his heart—but I deny his nobility. Ecclesiastic narrow-mindedness spoils a character that might have been perfect had it been less bound and hampered by tradition. Cancellor is a couple of centuries behind the time. His church is the church of Laud."

"I thought you admired and loved him, George," said Mildred regretfully.

"I admire his good qualities; I love him for his thoroughness; but our creeds are wide apart. I cannot even pretend to think as he thinks."

This confession increased Mildred's sadness. She would have had her husband think as she thought, believe, as she believed, in all spiritual things. The beloved child they had lost was waiting for them in Heaven; and she would fain that they should both tread the same path to that better world where there would be no more tears, no more death—where day and night would be alike in the light of the great Throne. She shuddered at the thought of any difference of creed on her husband's part, shuddered at that beginning of divergence which might end in infidelity. She had been educated by Clement Cancellor, and she thought as he thought. It seemed to her that she was surrounded by an atmosphere of doubt. In the books she read, among the more cultivated people whom she met, she found the same tendency to speculative infidelity, pessimism, Darwinism, sociology, Pantheism, anything but Christian belief. The nearest approach to religious feeling seemed to be found in the theosophists, with their last fashionable Oriental improvements upon the teaching of Christ.

Clement Cancellor had trained her in the belief that there was one Church, one Creed, one Sovereign Rule of life, outside of which determinate boundary line lay the dominion of Satan. And now, seeing her husband's variance with her pastor upon this minor point of the marriage law, she began to ask herself whether those two might not stand as widely apart upon graver questions—whether George Greswold might not be one of those half-hearted Christians who attend their parish church and keep Sunday sacred because it is well to set a good example to their neighbours and dependants, while their own faith is a vanishing quantity, a memory of youthful beliefs, the fading reflection of a sun that has sunk below the horizon.

She had discovered her husband capable of a suppression of truth that was almost as bad as falsehood, and now, having begun to doubt his conscientiousness, it was not unnatural that she should begin to doubt his religious feeling.

"Had he been as deeply religious as I thought him he would not have so deceived me," she told herself, still brooding upon that mystery of his first marriage.

Castellani's presence in the house was a continual source of irritation to her. It tortured her to think that he knew more of her husband's past life than was known to herself. She longed to question him, yet refrained, feeling that there would be unspeakable meanness, treachery against her husband even, in obtaining any information on that past life except from his own lips. He had chosen to keep silence, he who could so easily have explained all things; and it was her duty to submit.

She tried to be interested in the concert, which involved a good deal of work for herself, as she was to play all the accompaniments, the piano part in a concertante duet by de Beriot with an amateur violin player, and a polacca by a modern classic by way of overture. There were rehearsals nearly every day, with much talk and tea drinking. Enderby seemed given over to bustle and gaiety—that grave old house which to her mind ought to have been silent as a sepulchre, now that Lola's voice could sound there never more.

"People must think I am forgetting her," she said to herself with a sigh, when half-a-dozen carriages had driven away from the door after two hours of bustle and confusion, much discussion as to the choice of songs, and the arrangement of the programme, which everybody wanted different.

"I cannot possibly sing 'The Three Fishers' after Mr. Scobell's 'Wanderer,'" protested Lady Millborough. "It would never do to have two dismal songs in succession."

Yet when it was proposed that her ladyship's song should succeed Mr. Rollinson's admirable rendering of George Grossmith's "He was such a Careful Man," she distinctly refused to sing immediately after a comic song.

"I am not going to take the taste of Mr. Rollinson's vulgarity out of people's mouths," she told Mildred in an audible aside.

To these God-gifted vocalists the accompanist was as an inferior being, a person with a mere mechanical gift of playing anything set before her with taste and style. They treated her as if she had been a machine.

"If you wouldn't mind going over this duet just once more I think we should feel more comfortable in it," said one of the two Miss Tadcasters, who were to take the roof off, metaphorically, in the "Giórno d'Orróre."

Mildred toiled with unwavering good nature, and suppressed her shudders at many a false note, and cast oil on the waters when the singers were inclined to quarrel. She was glad of the drudgery that kept her fingers and her mind occupied: she was glad of any distraction that changed the current of her thoughts.

It was the day before the concert. César Castellani had established himself as *l'ami de la maison*, a person who had the right to come in and out as he liked, whose coming and going made no difference to the master of the house. Had George Greswold's mind been less abstracted from the business of every-day life he might have seen danger to Pamela Ransome's peace of mind in the frequent presence of the Italian, and he might have considered it his duty, as the young lady's kinsman, to have restricted Mr. Castellani's privileges. But the blow which had crushed George Greswold's heart a little more than a year ago had left him in some wise a broken man. He had lost all interest in the common joys and occupations of every-day life. His days were spent for the most part in long walks or rides in the loneliest places he could find; his only evening amusement was found in books, and those books of a kind which engrossed his attention and took him out of himself. His wife's companionship was always precious to him; but their intercourse had lost all the old gaiety and much of the old familiarity. There was an indefinable something which held them asunder, even when they were sitting in the same room, or pacing side by side, just as of old, upon the lawn in front of the drawing-room, or idling in their summer parlour in the shade of the cedars.

Again and again in the last three weeks some question about the past had trembled upon Mildred's lips as she sat at work by the piano where Castellani played in dreamy idleness, wandering from one master to another, or extemporizing after his own capricious fancies. Again and again she had struggled against the temptation and had conquered. No, she would not stoop to a meanness. She would not be disloyal to her husband by so much as one idle question.

To-day Castellani was in high spirits, proud of to-morrow's anticipated success, in which his own exertions would count for

much. He sat at the piano in leisure hour after tea. All the performers had gone, after the final adjustment of every detail. Mildred sat idle, with her head resting against the cushion of a high-backed arm-chair, exhausted by the afternoon's labours. Pamela stood by the piano watching and listening delightedly as Castellani improvised.

"I will give you my musical transcript of St. Partridge Day," he said, smiling down at the notes as he played a lively melody with little rippling runs in the treble, and crisp staccato chords in the bass. "This is morning and all the shooters are on tip-toe with delight—a misty morning," gliding into a dreamy legato movement as he spoke. "You can scarcely see the hills yonder, and the sun is not yet up. See, there he leaps above that eastern ridge, and all is brightness," changing to brilliant arpeggios up and down the piano. "Hark, there is chanticleer. How shrill he peals in the morning air. The dogs are leaving the kennel—and now the gates are open, dogs and men are in the road. You can hear the steady tramp of the clumsy shooting boots—your dreadful English boots—and the merry music of the dogs. Pointers, setters, spaniels, smooth beasts and curly beasts, shaking the dew from the hedgerows as they scramble along the banks, flying over the ditches—creatures of lightning swiftness; yes, even those fat heavy spaniels which seem made to sprawl and snap at flies in the sunshine or snore beside the fire."

He talked in brief snatches, playing all the time—playing with the easy brilliancy, the unerring grace of one to whom music is a native tongue—as natural a mode of thought-expression as speech itself.

"I hope I don't bore you very much," he said presently, looking up at Mildred as she sat white and silent, the fair face and pale gold hair defined against the dark sea-green brocade of the chair cushion.

He looked up at her in wondering admiration, as at a beautiful picture. How lovely she was, with a loveliness that grew upon him, and took possession of his fancy and his senses with a strengthening hold day by day. It was a melancholy loveliness, the beauty of a woman whose life had come to a dead stop, in whose breast love and hope were dead—or dormant.

"Not dead," he told himself, "only sleeping. Whose shall be the magic touch to awaken the sleeper? Who shall be the Orpheus to bring back so sweet an Eurydice from the realms of Death?"

Such thoughts were in his mind as he sat looking at her, waiting for her answer, playing all the while, telling her how fair she was in the tenderest variations of an old German air whose every note breathed passionate love.

"How sweet," murmured Pamela; "what an exquisite melody," taking some of the sweetness to herself. "How could such sweet-

ness weary any one with the ghost of an ear? You are not bored by it, are you aunt?"

"Bored; no, it is delightful," answered Mildred, rousing herself from a reverie. "My thoughts went back to my childhood while you were playing. I never knew but one other person who had that gift of improvization, and she used to play to me when I was a child. She was almost a child herself, and of course she did not come within a long distance of you as a pianist; but she would sit and play to me for an hour in the twilight, inventing new melodies, or playing recollections of old melodies as she went along, describing in music. The old fairy tales are for ever associated with music in my mind, because of those old memories. I believe she was highly gifted in music."

"Music of a high order is not an uncommon gift among women of sensitive temperament," said Castellani musingly. "I take it to be only another name for sympathy. The want of musical feeling is want of sympathy. Shakespeare knew that when he declared the non-musical man to be by nature a villain. I could no more imagine you without the gift of music than I could imagine the stars without the quality of light. Mr. Greswold's first wife was musical—as no doubt you know—indeed, highly gifted as a musician."

"You heard her play—and sing?" faltered Mildred, avoiding a direct reply.

The sudden mention of her dead rival's name had quickened the beating of her heart. She had longed to question him and had refrained; and now without any act of hers he had spoken, and she was going to hear something about that woman whose existence was a mystery to her, of whose Christian name even she was ignorant.

"Yes, I heard her several times at parties at Nice. She was much admired for her musical talents. She was not a grand singer, but she had been well taught, and she had exquisite taste, and knew exactly the kind of music that suited her best. She was one of the attractions at the Palais Montano, where one heard only the best music."

"I think you said the other day that you did not meet her often," said Mildred. "My husband could hardly have forgotten you had you met frequently."

"I can scarcely say that we met frequently, and our meetings were such as Mr. Greswold would not be very likely to remember. I am not a remarkable man now; and I was a very insignificant person fifteen years ago. I was only asked to people's houses because I could sing a little, and because my father had a reputation in the south as a composer. I was never introduced to your husband, but I was presented to his wife—as a precocious youth with some pretensions to a tenor voice—and I found her very charming—after her own particular style."

"Was she a beautiful woman?" asked Mildred. "I—I—have never talked about her to my husband—she died so young—and——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted Castellani as she hesitated. "Of course you would not speak of her. There are things that cannot be spoken about. There is always the skeleton in every life—not more in Mr. Greswold's past than in that of other people, perhaps, could we know all histories. I was wrong to speak of her—her name escaped me unawares."

"Pray don't apologize," said Mildred, kindling with indignant feeling at something in his tone which hinted at wrong-doing on her husband's part. "There can be no reason why you should keep silence—to me; though any mention of an old sorrow might wound him. I know my husband too well not to know that he must have behaved honourably in every relation of life—before I knew him as well as afterwards. I only asked a very simple question—was my predecessor as beautiful as she was gifted?"

"No. She was charming, piquant, elegant, *spirituelle*, but she was not handsome. I think she was conscious of that want of perfect beauty, and that it made her sensitive and even bitter. I have heard her say hard things of women who were handsomer than herself. She had a scathing tongue and a capricious temper, and she was not a favourite with her own sex, though she was very much admired by clever men. I know that as a lad I thought her one of the brightest women I had ever met."

"It was sad that she should die so young," said Mildred.

She would not for worlds that this man should know the extent of her ignorance about the woman who had borne her husband's name. She spoke vaguely, hoping that he would take it for granted she knew all.

"Yes," assented Castellani with a sigh, "her death was infinitely sad."

He spoke as of an event of more than common sadness—a calamity that had been in some wise more tragical than even untimely death must needs be.

Mildred kept silence, though her heart ached with shapeless forebodings, though it would have been an unspeakable relief to know the worst rather than to feel the oppression of this mystery.

Castellani rose to take his leave. He was paler than he had been before the conversation began; and he had a troubled air. Pamela looked at him with sympathetic distress. "I am afraid you are dreadfully tired," she said as they shook hands.

"I am never tired—in this house," he answered; and Pamela appropriated the compliment by her vivid blush.

Mildred Greswold shook hands with him mechanically and in silence. She was hardly conscious of his leaving the room. She rose and went out into the garden, while Pamela sat down to the piano and began singing her part in the everlasting duet. She

never sang anything else nowadays; it was a perpetual carol of admiration for the author of "Nepenthe."

"'Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
If I had but lived for thee;
'Twere sweet to fade as the twilight fades
Over the Western sea,"

she warbled, while Mildred paced slowly to and fro in front of the cedars, brooding over every word Castellani had spoken about her husband's first wife.

"Her death was infinitely sad."

Why infinitely? The significance of the word troubled her. It conjured up all manner of possibilities. Why infinitely sad? All death is sad. The death of the young especially so. But to say even of untimely death that it was infinitely sad would seem to lift it out of the region of humanity's common doom. That qualifying word hinted at a tragical fate rather than a young life cut short by any ordinary malady. There had been something in Castellani's manner which accentuated the meaning of his words. That troubled look, that deep sigh, that hurried departure, all hinted at a mystery—at a painful story which he knew and did not wish to reveal.

He had in a manner apologized for speaking of George Greswold's first wife. There must have been a reason for that. He was not a man to say meaningless things out of *gaucherie*; not a man to stumble and equivocate from either shyness or stupidity. He had implied that Mr. Greswold was not likely to talk about his first marriage—that he would naturally avoid any allusion to his first wife.

Why naturally? Why should he not speak of that past life? Men are not ordinarily reticent upon such subjects. And that a man should suppress the fact of a first marriage altogether, should falsely describe himself in the marriage register, would suggest memories so dark as to impel an honourable man to stoop to a lie rather than face the horror of revelation.

She walked up and down that fair stretch of velvet turf upon which her feet had trodden so lightly in the happy years that were gone—gone never to be recalled, as it seemed to her, carrying with them all that she had ever known of domestic peace, of wedded bliss. Never again could they two be as they had been. The mystery of the past had risen up between them—like some hooded phantom, a vaguely threatening figure, a hidden face—to hold them apart for evermore.

"If he had only trusted me," she thought despairingly, "there is hardly any sin that I would not have forgiven for love of him. Why could he not believe in my love well enough to know that I should judge him leniently—if there had been wrong-doing on his side—if—if——"

She had puzzled over that hidden past, trying to penetrate the darkness, imagining the things that might have happened—infidelity on the wife's part—infidelity on the husband's side—another and fatal attachment taking the place of loyal love. Sin of some kind there must have been, she thought—for such dark memories could scarcely be sinless. But was husband or wife the sinner?

"Her death was infinitely sad."

That sentence stood out against the dark background of mystery, as if written in fire. That one fact was absolute. George Greswold's first wife had died under circumstances of peculiar sadness; so painful that Castellani's countenance grew pale and troubled at the very thought of her death.

"I cannot endure it," Mildred cried at last in an agony of doubt. "I will not endure this torture for another day. I will appeal to him. I will question him. If he values my love and my esteem he will answer faithfully. It must be painful for him, painful for me; but it will be far better for us both in the long run. Anything will be better than these torturing fears, these imaginary evils. I am his wife, and I have a right to know the truth."

The dressing gong summoned her back to the house. Her husband was in the drawing-room half-an-hour afterwards, when she went down to dinner. He was still in his jacket and knickerbockers, just as he had come in from a long ramble.

"Will you forgive me if I dine with you in these clothes, Mildred, and you, Pamela?" to the damsel in white muslin, whom he had just surprised at the piano, still warbling her honeyed strain about death and the roses; "I came in five minutes ago—dead beat. I have been in the forest, and had a tramp with the deer-hounds over Bramble Hill."

"You walk too far, George. You are looking dreadfully tired."

"I'm sure you needn't apologize for your dress on my account," said Pamela. "Henry is a perfect disgrace half his time. He hates evening clothes, and I sometimes fear he hates soap and water. He can reconcile his conscience to any amount of dirt so long as he has his cold tub in the morning. He thinks that justifies anything. I have had to sit next him at dinner when he came straight from rats," concluded Pamela with a shudder. "But Rosalind is so foolishly indulgent. She would spoil twenty husbands."

"And you, I suppose, would be a martinet to one?" said Greswold, smiling at the girl's animated face.

"It would depend. If I were married to an artist I could forgive any neglect of the proprieties. One does not expect a man of that kind to be the slave of conventionalities; but a commonplace man like Sir Henry Mountford has nothing to recommend him but his horse and tailor."

They went to dinner, and Pamela's prattle relieved the gloom which had fallen upon husband and wife. George Greswold saw that there were signs of a new trouble in his wife's face. He sat for nearly an hour alone with the untouched decanters before him, and with Cassandra's head upon his knee. The dog always knew when his thoughts were darkest, and would not be repulsed at such times. She was not obtrusive—she only wanted to let him know there was some one in the world who loved him.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he left the dining-room. He looked in at the drawing-room door, and saw his wife and his niece sitting at work, silent both.

"I am going to the library to write some letters, Mildred," he said; "don't sit up for me."

She rose quickly and went over to him.

"Let me have half-an-hour's talk with you first, George," she said in an earnest voice; "I want so much to speak to you."

"My dearest, I am always at your service," he answered quietly, and they went across the hall together, to that fine old room which was essentially the domain of the masters of the house.

It was a large room with three long narrow windows—unaltered from the days of Queen Anne—looking out to the carriage drive in the front of the house. The walls were lined with books, in severely architectural book-cases. There was a lofty old marble chimney-piece, richly decorated, and a large knee-hole desk in front of the fireplace, at which Mr. Greswold was wont to sit. There was a shaded reading lamp ready lighted for him upon this table, and there was no other lamp in the room. By this dim light the sombre colouring of oak book-cases and maroon velvet window curtains deepened to black. The spacious room had almost a funereal aspect, like that awful banqueting hall to which the jocose Domitian invited his parasites and straightway frightened them to death.

"Well, Mildred, what is the matter?" asked Greswold, when his wife had seated herself beside him in front of the massive oak desk at which all the business of his estate had been transacted since he came to Enderby. "There is nothing amiss, love, I hope, to make you so earnest?"

"There is something very much amiss, George," she answered. "Forgive me if I pain you by what I have to say—by the questions I am going to ask. I cannot help giving you pain, and truly and dearly as I love you, I cannot go on suffering as I have suffered since that wretched Sunday afternoon when I discovered how you had deceived me—you whom I so trusted, so honoured as the most upright among men."

"It is a little hard that you should say I deceived you, Mildred. I suppressed one fact which had no bearing upon my relations with you."

"You must have signed your name to a falsehood in the register if you described yourself as a bachelor."

"I did not so describe myself. I confided the fact of my first marriage to your father on the eve of our wedding. I told him why I had been silent—told him that my past life had been steeped in bitterness. He was generous enough to accept my confidence and to ask no questions. My bride was too shy and too much troubled by the emotion of the hour to observe what I wrote in the register, or else she might have noted the word 'widower' after my name."

"Thank God you did not sign your name to a lie," said Mildred with a sigh of relief.

"I am sorry my wife of fourteen years should think me capable of falsehood on the document that sealed my fate with hers."

"Oh, George, I know how true you are—how true and upright you have been in every word and every act of your life since we two have been one. It is not in my nature to misjudge you. I *cannot* think you capable of doing wrong to any one even under strongest temptation. I cannot believe that fate could set such a snare for you as could entrap you into one dishonourable act; but I am tortured by the thought of a past life of which I know nothing. Why did you hide your marriage from me when we were lovers? Why are you silent and secret now, when I am your wife, the other half of yourself, ready to sympathize with you, to share the burden of dark memories? Trust me, George, trust me. This secret is rising up between us like a stony barrier. Trust me, dear love, and let us be again as we have been, united in every thought."

"You do not know what you are asking me, Mildred," said George Greswold, in his deep, grave voice, looking at her with haggard reproachful eyes. "You cannot measure the torture you are inflicting by this senseless curiosity."

"You cannot measure the tortures of doubt which I have suffered since I have known that you loved another woman before you loved me—loved her so well that you cannot bear even to speak of that past life which you lived with her—regret her so intensely that now, after fourteen years of wedded life with me, the mere memory of that lost love can plunge you into gloom and despair," said Mildred passionately.

That smothered fire of jealousy which had been smouldering in her breast for weeks broke out all at once in impetuous speech. She no longer cared what she said. Her only thought was that the dead love had been dearer and nearer than the living, that she had been cozened by a lover whose heart had never been wholly hers, never, even in the roseate dawn of her girlhood, nor in the sunlight of her early married life. She had been duped by her own affections, perhaps, from the very beginning.

"I thought he must love me with the same measure that I loved him," she said to herself.

"You are very cruel, Mildred," her husband answered quietly. "You are probing an old wound, and a deep one, to the quick. You degrade yourself more than you degrade me by causeless jealousy and unworthy doubts. Yes, I did conceal the fact of my first marriage—not because I had loved my wife too well—but because I had not loved her well enough. I was silent about a period of my life which was one of unutterable misery—which it was my duty to myself to forget, if it were possible to forget—which it was a peril to remember. My only chance of happiness—or peace of mind—lay in total oblivion of that bitter time. It was only when I loved you that I began to believe forgetfulness was possible to me. I courted oblivion by every means in my power. I told myself that the man who had so suffered was a man who had ceased to exist. George Ransome was dead. George Greswold stood on the threshold of a new life, with infinite capacities for happiness. I told myself that I might be a beloved and honoured husband—which I had never been; a useful member of society—which I had not been hitherto. Until that hour all things had been against me. With you for my wife, all things would be in my favour. For thirteen happy years this promise of our marriage morning was fully realized; then came my darling's death; and now comes your estrangement."

"I am not estranged, George. It is only my dread of the beginning of estrangement which tortures me. Since that man spoke of your first wife, I have brooded perpetually upon that hidden past. It is weak and foolish, I know, to have done so. I ought to trust unquestioningly; but I cannot, George, I cannot. I love you too well to love without jealousy."

"Well, let the veil be lifted, then, since it must be so. Ask what questions you please, and I will answer them—as best I can."

"You are very good," she faltered, drawing a little nearer to him, leaning her head against his shoulder as she talked to him, and laying her hand on his as it lay before him on the desk, tightly clenched. "Tell me, dear, were you happy with your first wife?"

"I was not."

"Not even in the beginning?"

"Hardly in the beginning. It was an ill-advised union, entered into upon impulse."

"But she loved you very dearly, perhaps."

"She loved me—dearly—after her manner of loving."

"And you did not love her?"

"It is a cruel thing you force me to say, Mildred. No, I did not love her."

"Had you been married long when she died?"

She felt a quivering movement in the clenched hand on which

her own lay caressingly, and she heard him draw a long and deep breath.

"About a year and a half."

"Her death was a sad one, I know. Did she go out of her mind before she died?"

"No."

"Did she leave you—or do you any great wrong?"

"No."

"Were you false to her, George—Oh, forgive me, forgive me; but there must have been something more sad than common sadness, and it might be that some new and fatal love——"

"There was no such thing," he answered sternly. "I was true to my marriage vow. It was not a long trial—only a year and a half. Even a profligate might keep faith for so short a span."

"I see you will not confide in me. I will ask no more questions, George. That kind of catechism will not make us more in sympathy with each other. I will ask you nothing more—except—just one question—a woman's question. Was your first wife beautiful in your eyes?"

"She was not beautiful, but she was intellectual, and she had an interesting countenance—a face that attracted me at first sight. It was even more attractive to me than the faces of much handsomer women. But if you would like to know what your fancied rival was like you need not languish in ignorance," he added, with some touch of scorn. "I have her photograph in this desk. I have kept it for my days of humiliation, to remind me of what I have been and what I may be again. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, George, if it will not pain you too much to show it to me."

"Do not talk of pain. You have stirred the waters of Marah so deeply that one more bitter drop cannot signify." He unlocked his desk as he spoke, lifted the lid which was sustained by a movable upright, and groped among the accumulation of papers and parchments inside.

The object for which he was seeking was at the back of the desk, under all the papers. He found it by touch, a morocco case containing a cabinet photograph. Mildred stood up beside him, with one hand on his shoulder as he searched.

He handed her the case without a word. She opened it in silence and looked at the portrait within. A small, delicately-featured face, with large, dark eyes—eyes almost too large for the face—a slender throat, thin sloping shoulders—eyes that looked out of the picture with a strange intensity, a curious alertness in the countenance as of a woman made up of nerves and emotions, a nature without the element of repose.

Mildred stared at the picture three or four seconds, and then with a choking sound like a strangled sob fell swooning at her husband's feet.

(To be continued.)

A FRENCHWOMAN IN LONDON.

BY ONE.

BEFORE I relate my first experiences of an independent life in London, it may be well to describe how it was I came to dwell in the great city.

For some years I had been a resident finishing governess, and had been fortunate enough to fall in with families of good means and position. One of these especially, with whom I resided six years, had really everything which money could buy or good taste suggest. They were very kind people, too; people with whom the generous saying of "*noblesse oblige*" was no empty phrase, but one well understood and acted up to. For my own part I was considered in every possible way, and shared to the full all the advantages they enjoyed. I believe I became a *gourmet* in the way of dinners, and a perfect sybarite in the way of all other comforts. I became susceptible to a *soupeçon* of a dinner in preparation, of the smoke of a live coal fallen in the fender, even of mice in the conservatory; I delighted in the delicate fragrance of the hot-house and other flowers which were nearly everywhere in the house; in short, the keen appreciation I have naturally for the best and most beautiful was entirely satisfied there.

The house, which looked like a French *château* in the Renaissance style, stood on the side of a hill in the fairest part of the Thames valley, and commanded a fine view of undulating woods and pastures reaching down from the sky line to the beautiful river itself. Within the house all was comfort and elegance; masterpieces in oil and water colours, of marble and ivory, and gems of wood carving met the eye on every side. After I had been there but a short time, I felt as if I had never lived otherwise—in fact I was living in my element.

But those happy years passed away all too soon, and the time came when my services were no longer required. The day on which I had to bid good-bye to people who had indeed been friends to me and had made me feel as one of themselves, was come at last. I recalled a day some eight years before, when I left my home to face the cold world alone; I was eighteen then. Misery and wretchedness filled my heart as the train swept past one familiar scene after another.

At my destination—the town house of the kind people I had just left—I began to realize how much I had lost. It was early in February; the day was bitterly cold, and rain and sleet had been falling. The house, not having been recently occupied, seemed cold and cheerless; and the feeling was increased by the look of the covered furniture and pictures. Still, there was a nice fire burning in the library, and that room at least looked cosy enough, being kept free from dust sheets and always ready for the use of any member of the family who might chance to come to town on shopping or other business.

If I already felt cold and wretched, what would it be thereafter? The nice motherly housekeeper came out smiling to meet me and to hear the latest news of the family. Soon she asked me what would I like for my dinner, and what should she get for my breakfast to-morrow. Alas, it was no time to ask me what I wanted to eat! It seemed to me as if the consumption of food was only to be considered by happy people, and that wretched ones had nothing whatever to do with it.

"Whatever you like, Mrs. Carry; you always know best what is nice," was my wise reply.

The house had been placed at my service, that I might stay there until I had found some comfortable abode to settle in. Comfortable abode! What a mockery! As I look back now upon that time, I marvel at myself and wonder how I survived the looking for the "comfortable abode" and my settling in it when found! Not that I am by any means sure that I am much better off now; but still I have become hardened, and can almost enjoy "roughing it." I had decided not to enter another family, but to take lodgings and give private lessons. I felt I could not bring myself to live among strangers again. I remembered how long it had taken me to get accustomed to the people I had just left. Probably I should not find new people like the old ones, and I should always be making comparisons unfavourable to the former; I should feel and look miserable, and they would be dissatisfied with me. This I could not have borne; it would have wounded my pride. No, I would take lodgings and give lessons, or take only visiting engagements. I had always had good salaries, and felt no doubt about being able still to earn a sufficient income. Since I left home I had been able to put by a good round sum of money; but unfortunately I had invested it so badly that I lost nearly all, and could only command about thirty pounds at the time I left the place which had been my second home.

This was to keep me until I should find engagements enough to live out of. I was not disheartened, though wretched; and on my first morning alone in London I sallied out, full of confidence that many happy days were in store for me, in search of a lodging. I had made up my mind that I would not be extravagant at first,

that until my affairs were running smoothly I would be content with but one room. The prospect of having soon to fit up a bed and sitting room quite cheered me up. As I sat by the fire in the library, I revelled in the furnishing of dozens of rooms. Here in this corner I would have a divan; of course I could not afford a regular one, but I should order two or three boxes of a certain length and size which would fit to each other. If I should have to move they would be so useful to pack odds and ends in. Then I would make cushions of some sweet material from Liberty's, filled with feathers—down would be too expensive. Then the curtains—well, they would be of a greenish colour; the carpet should be a warm red, and the wall paper blush-rose, or at any rate something of that kind. Of course I would have plenty of flowers—violets or mignonette—so as to have the air always deliciously scented. I would invite So-and-so to tea sometimes, and of course my pupils would often be running in—my pupils and I are always great friends—and I could see myself often at the confectioner's ordering such "goodies" as they liked best.

What a fool's paradise it was! How I managed to keep up my spirits and even dream of the future still, after having taken my first look into a lodging house, I cannot now understand. But I did.

But it was not pleasant, even at first. There was I, looking into one dingy hole after another and coming out unsuited, but bright as ever, saying repeatedly to myself, "Never mind; I shall soon find something suitable; perhaps a sweet little room in the house of a respectable family, the father a clerk perhaps, and the mother a kind matronly woman, with one or two nicely-brought-up daughters; they let a spare room in their comfortable little house just to help towards the household expenses." With such like reasoning I kept up my spirits on the whole—but it was only *on the whole*. While I was in a house, looking at the room advertised on a card in the windows or outside as to let, I was very miserable.

Generally my knock or ring was answered by a dirty, dishevelled woman whose very appearance was enough to frighten me. My first impulse was always to run away; but the steady gaze of the harpy would hold me immovable until I confessed that I wished to see the room which was to let.

"Do you want it for yourself?" said one awful woman to me.

"Yes."

"Are you in all day?"

"Well, I cannot say for certain yet, but I hope not."

She looked at me suspiciously. "You are not in business, then."

"No, I——"

"We prefer a gentleman who is out all day," she broke in sharply.

"Very well; good afternoon." I went out thinking that gentlemen were quite welcome to such a nice landlady.

A more wholesome-looking woman answered my next summons, and my hopes revived a little.

"We don't take in ladies. My husband objects to them," she said at once in reply to my inquiry about the room to let. Rather startled at this unexpected announcement, I made a hasty retreat toward the street.

"Perhaps you don't go out late in the evening?" she said quickly and in a more conciliatory tone of voice.

"I don't know what I should go out in the evening for; but as your husband objects to ladies taking a room in your house, we need say no more. Good afternoon."

"But perhaps it will be different in your case. Come and see the room."

"I don't think it will be any use."

"You needn't take the room unless you like it," she urged.

I had to go. It was not a bad little room, but very tiny; with my three big boxes in it I should not have room enough to turn round. During our inspection the landlady dilated volubly on the woes and troubles of a lodging-house keeper, and gave me the entire history of a former tenant, a governess who had spent five long months seeking a situation, finding one at last which happily had proved worth waiting for.

"All's well that ends well," said I. "Your room is very clean and nice, but I am afraid it would be too small for me. I will take your address though, in case I do not find anything to suit me better." I had become quite cordially disposed towards the woman whose husband objected to ladies.

At the next house I stopped at I was received by a woman whose breath was simply reeking of spirits. However, as I did not notice it until after I had stated my object in calling, I could not retreat, so followed her upstairs. The room she showed me was very dull-looking and painfully dusty, in fact it seemed as if the dust had become petrified in lines corresponding to the shape of the furniture. It looked out on to three black walls, surmounted by a solemn-looking row of chimney-pots. Except for the inconvenience of having committed some crime or other, I think that, as a mere matter of choice, I should have preferred a prison-cell to this room.

"Well, do you want it to-night?" the fragrant landlady inquired, in the tone of a sergeant addressing a recruit.

Her harsh voice recalled me from my meditations just as I had begun to picture the undoubted advantages of a clean prison cell compared to this dirty hole.

"Oh, no; I should not want it to-night. In fact, I am in no hurry. I wish to look at several rooms and take the best."

This seemed to raise the wrath of the old lady.

"What are you coming bothering people for if you don't want to engage a room at once? The idea!"

She rushed out of the room and stamped angrily down the stairs, murmuring all the while, "The idea, indeed, of troubling one like that just to look at a room! The idea!"

I hurried after her, only too anxious to get out of that den. When I found myself in the doorway I turned and said, not very wisely, perhaps, "You are distinctly very rude."

"It is you who are rude, bothering one for nothing," I believe she said.

I stepped quickly out of the doorway just as she slammed the door violently in my face.

If I had been shy at knocking at strange people's doors before, after this I was utterly unnerved; I was outraged, and quite trembled with indignation. I had never heard the like before, and from such a woman, too! However, after a while I got calmer, and the little scene really gave me a little more *aplomb* and thus was of some service to me after all. Before I had only felt a few drops of cold water, but that episode was certainly a *douche*. Ah, well, a few cold drops would never hurt or shock me any more.

The rooms I had seen were one and all utterly uninviting. In vain did I in imagination remove from the walls all the bad and stupid pictures and hang up my own nicely-framed sketches and paintings; in vain did I banish the bottle-green ornament from the mantelpiece; in vain did I drape the window with some Liberty's muslin and put a tasteful cover over the bed. No, it was all in vain. The ugly yellow painted chest of drawers could not be transformed; the chairs, cane-bottomed and black with stains, would always stand there; the threadbare carpet, patched here and there with pieces of a different pattern, would always assert itself through any number of rugs and mats I could put down; besides, what a pity it would be to damage my pretty rugs by laying them upon such a dirty carpet. And then I began to reflect that if I should require so many additions to make a furnished room decently habitable, I might as well get a bedstead and a few other things and take an unfurnished room, in which I should not be cursed with dirt-grimed chairs and dirty carpets. Yes, decidedly it would be wiser to take an unfurnished room and fit it up to my own taste. To begin with, the bed would be such a comfort. I had shuddered as I thought of having to lie down upon the beds I had seen so far, beds which had been occupied by I knew not whom—perhaps by persons dirty, ill or diseased. It was really too disgusting to think about.

As soon as this bright thought entered my mind I set off in quest of such a room, and searched well nigh every street and terrace between Earl's Court and Sloane Street. I could only find one or two "to be let unfurnished." I looked at them of course.

They were dingy little rooms all of them, with no better outlook than the worst furnished rooms I had seen. While I was looking at one of them it suddenly occurred to me that I should want some attendance even in an unfurnished room. Who would clean the grate, bring me some hot water in the morning, or cook me a chop or a fish when required? I asked the woman who was showing the room if I could have any attendance.

"Not in the house," she replied; "but I daresay you could get a charwoman who would clean the room for you if you liked."

Clearly that wouldn't do. I had resolved at the outset not to give more than ten shillings a week for the room and attendance. I soon found that an unfurnished room with attendance from outside, if I could get it, would cost me much more. I saw there was nothing to be done in that direction, and I turned my attention once more to furnished rooms.

At last, after having looked at several more, I found one which seemed the best I had been shown. The landlady was clean and well-spoken; the house was a good one and looked well cared for; the room to be let was a garret to be sure, but it had two windows looking on to the street, and it seemed perfectly clean; I could give it a bright look by rearranging it a little. It was ten shillings a week, just the sum I could give; and the landlady would for that amount send me some hot water each morning, do the room every day, and cook me any little thing like a chop or fish. I agreed to take it.

It was a bright sunshiny day when I entered my new quarters, with all my goods and chattels; nevertheless, I felt unutterably miserable and lonely. I sat for a while among my boxes and parcels like one stunned, unable to make up my mind which to unpack first, and vaguely realizing how great a change a week had brought in my life. Only a week ago I had left all that belongs to a refined and prosperous life; it seemed to me that ages separated me from that happy time. Yes, indeed! Circumstances had so changed since then that only imagination could measure the difference. I roused myself at last from my gloomy thoughts, and began to unpack the nearest box, and tried to persuade myself that all would soon be well: I should soon have many lessons to give, which would afford me sufficient occupation, and I would arrange my room in such a manner that it should be a really cosy nook in which to rest peacefully when tired or needing solitude. I worked away till the growing dusk reminded me of tea. Ah, me! Unless I went to the grocer's I should not get any. No doubt the landlady would supply me for the first day, but to-morrow I should have none. I felt it would be better to go at once and get some. I went to a shop hard by and bought some tea and marmalade; I considered I should have something substantial, too, though I was not hungry, and I bought a box of sardines and some bread. For the first time

since my childhood I found myself laden with parcels! It was dark when I reached my attic; I had not remembered that I had no light. I went out again and purchased a lamp and some oil. Then I remembered I should require a spirit lamp and kettle to boil my water with. After reaching my room with all these purchases I thought to myself that at last I should be comfortable. Alas, I soon found I needed many other things, but I could not bring myself to sally forth again, so put off further errands until the morrow.

What a dreary night it was! Although the people were clean and respectable, I felt very suspicious about the bed when the time came to use it. I poured some eau-de-cologne on a handkerchief and placed it between my face and the pillow. It was a large bedstead and had a spring mattress under the wool one; the former was all right enough, the latter was not—it seemed filled with hard round balls, which made you fancy you were lying on a bag of potatoes. In the morning I mentioned this fact to the landlady. "Yes," she said coolly, "it is rather a bad mattress; it wasn't a good one when it was bought." And with that I had to be content, or leave. I preferred to accustom myself to lie on a bag of potatoes.

When I woke on my first morning in this room it was bitterly cold, and I seemed to be in a well. I thought the thing to warm me would be to take my cold bath at once. The experiment was not very successful; I felt a kind of glow for about a quarter of an hour, and then I was shivering more than before. I lighted a fire then, but the grate was but a wee tiny one, as big as my hand, perhaps, and most of the little heat the fire gave went up the chimney. When I looked up the chimney I could see the sky; the room might well be cold! All that morning I kept up as much fire as the grate would hold, but there was no perceptible warmth a few feet away from it.

Then I thought of my lunch. The landlady would only cook me a chop or some small piece of meat; but, of course, I should require vegetables also. As I had a fire which seemed to be useless for heating, it might serve for cooking perhaps. I went out and bought a saucepan—which, as I wanted it immediately, I carried home myself—also some vegetables and a small piece of meat. My idea was to make a French *pot-au-feu*. I borrowed a knife from the kitchen, and soon had my vegetables cleaned, cut up, and placed in the saucepan on the fire. My hands were rather the worse for this employment, and were black with handling the saucepan and tending the fire by the time my meal was cooked, and my face was not much cleaner. However, I felt quite cheered up by the occupation, and was really delighted when I found that my first attempt at cooking was most successful; then I had meals enough cooked for a couple of days, and I was infinitely satisfied at my achievement.

I spent other mornings in like manner, making myself sometimes one soup and sometimes another. It was difficult, of course, to make much change with so few utensils, and I grew to be very ingenious in making them serve all purposes. I became quite proud of my skill before long, and even invited a friend to lunch one day for the fun of it. But my housekeeping arrangements showed at their best at my teas. I asked a girl student friend of mine to tea several times for the sake of her company, on which occasions the landlady lent me all extra tea things I required, and in that way I spent many cheerful hours in my garret, which were a delightful change from the rest of the time I spent indoors. The weather was mostly bitterly, bitterly cold; the winter was unusually long, and to me seemed as if it would never end; the temperature in my room never reached a higher point than 50° during my first three months. The sun never shone on my side of the house at all, and, as I said before, the fire gave out but little heat. After the first week I discovered I could burn nearly a scuttleful of coals a day. As each scuttleful cost sixpence I could not allow myself such an expense with so little result. Besides, the chimney being open to the sky, sent me back my smoke and that of other people's as well. Then I used a fire only when I wanted to cook; to keep warm at other times I put on my coat and fur cloak, in fact I never had them off except when I went to bed for the whole of that three months. The draughts in the room were fearful; the two windows would not fit at the top, one of them had a two-inch aperture (which I filled up with paper) and consequently would not fasten. I should not have been much better off if they had fitted properly, for there was such a dreadful smell of returned smoke at most times that I was obliged to keep one of them a little open nearly always. At first I could not understand what that terrible smell was, and I asked the landlady about it.

"Oh," she said, "it comes from the next-door chimney. They had it on fire some time ago and the heat cracked the brickwork between the flues, which lets their smoke come into your chimney and some of it blows down into the room."

"Well," I said, "it is very disagreeable. I am obliged to have the window open well nigh all day, and I am nearly frozen already."

"Oh, I will have it seen to some day."

"I hope soon." The soon, alas! proved to be when it was warm weather; then it was done.

Never had I felt the cold before as I did then! I had lived through two very severe winters in the Black Forest when snow and ice remained on the ground for weeks and months together—but how different it was. In the winter the air was so dry there that we hardly felt the cold; it made our blood course quickly through our veins when we went out, and we came in all in a glow and full of high spirits. Ah! but what difference there was be-

tween the nice warm houses there, with their tall china stoves and their double windows, and this garret in the middle of London! Here if I succeeded in getting my head and shoulders warm my feet were cold, and if I got my feet warm my back grew cold and cold shivers ran down my spine. Often I went out to try to warm myself by walking, but generally had to face a bitter east wind which seemed to me to blow in all directions at once, and I would retreat to my garret again chilled to the marrow.

When I opened the front door with my latch key the warmth of the house struck pleasantly upon me, and in passing up the stairs I could sometimes see into the dining-room with its well-curtained windows and brightly-burning fire—how I longed to have just such a comfortable nook to go to! But I never entered this cosy room; the occupier thought herself of too great importance to strike an acquaintance with the tenant of the garret; nor did the other old lady, who had the next two floors, think it compatible with her dignity to exchange even a few words with another solitary being. I never spoke to either tenant during the whole of the six months I passed in that house; if I met either of them on the stairs she would rush into her room and slam the door in my face! The further one went up the house the colder it got, and in my room the temperature was much the same as outside. To get a little warmth I used to fill a hot-water bottle with boiling water, heated by my spirit lamp, and put it on the floor or on my bed, which I used as a sofa, where I could put my feet on it; then I would cover my shoulders with my fur cloak and my knees with an eider down quilt. In this way I read, and worked, and thought on all cold days. The thoughts were suited to the circumstances. How long the winter seemed to be! Would it never come to an end? I had never noticed winter coming or going before; to me it had always meant brisk walks with my pupils, skating, and even tobogganing, in the daytime; and in the evenings blazing fires, plenty of nice books, long talks and merry games. How often I recalled those winters as I sat in my garret! Then I would pull myself up and try to persuade myself that things would be brighter soon; why should I not soon be earning an ample income with which I could command a comfortable home? "Till now," thought I, "my services have been appreciated and well paid for, and they will be again. My eight years of experience and continued study have made me more valuable; I have my diploma and some certificates, besides the most excellent references, and I know that my teaching is worth the best terms paid for such services. I shall soon obtain a few pupils, and more will quickly follow beyond doubt."

Thus I comforted myself, at first; and I set diligently about making known my requirements. Three times a week I advertised in the *Times* and the *Morning Post*; two or three times a week I called on certain agents and at Queen's College, Harley

Street, to examine the lists of those requiring lessons; I got incorporated to the Teachers' Guild, and wrote many letters to my friends. Days, weeks and months passed by, and nothing came of all my trouble! Somehow nobody seemed to require tuition, except a few persons who offered terms like two shillings a lesson and who lived in distant suburbs which would take several hours and half the fee to get to and from.

I received one promising reply to one of my advertisements. I happened to be staying for a few days with the kind people with whom I lived six years. The name sounded good and the address was that of one of the finest houses in Kensington; I afterwards found they were people of very good standing and of great wealth. Well, I took the very first train the next morning, although I was ill with violent neuralgia; but it was to me a matter of so much importance that I could not allow myself to remain in bed. I reached the house at eleven o'clock, and was immediately ushered into an elegant boudoir. As I entered a Frenchman came out, evidently the cook, with his *menu* in his hand. This augured well: at any rate there would be no difficulty here in arranging terms. The lady was extremely well dressed, and the house was most tastefully decorated and furnished, so far as I could judge by the hall, the dining-room—which I had seen *en passant*—and the boudoir.

As soon as I was seated she explained to me that she had a very intelligent daughter just fifteen years old—at which I rejoiced inwardly, seeing her already my pupil—and that she desired her to have advanced lessons in literature, history, arithmetic, and so on. I said it was exactly such tuition which I was most qualified to give.

She went on to say she would require me to come to the house for the whole of each day, or rather from ten till five, and that she would give £40 a year! I almost jumped off my chair at these words. I pointed out to her, as well as my disgust would permit, that I could not support myself on forty pounds a year, and a moment later found myself in the street. I was profoundly depressed as I sat in the train on my way back to my kind and generous friends, and I thought bitterly of all the trouble and expense I had incurred, only to receive a slap in the face, so to speak. Forty pounds *a year*! I wondered if the French cook contented himself with such a pittance. And to offer a lady who was to form the mind and heart of a growing girl less than a mere cook seemed to me atrocious. I wondered if that lady could even dress herself on forty pounds a year. Perhaps if somebody were to ask her such a question she would think it absurd, or feel insulted. And how can a governess live and dress like a lady, or even at all, on forty pounds a year? Why, it would scarcely pay for my room and some food. As it was I deprived myself of fires, except when absolutely necessary for

cooking purposes, and took neither tea nor coffee; bread, and porridge and milk, with a box of sardines once a week, formed my principal foods at that time, as I only allowed myself eight shillings a week for food. For the life of me I could not see how I could live and find even needles and cotton, to say nothing of clothing, on forty pounds a year.

When three months had passed away in fruitless search I began to realize that the moment would soon be present when I should not have one penny left. All my advertisements, agents' fees, and expenses of living and travelling here and there seeking engagements had sorely diminished my funds, and my thirty pounds had dwindled down to five!

I shudder still when I think of those times. The long solitary days, mostly so cold and bitter, and my constant disappointments, had made sad havoc with my good spirits. I became terribly depressed and listless, and when my last five pounds had to be drawn upon I became so oppressed with the idea that I should soon be penniless, that I used to wake regularly in the middle of the night with a horrible sensation of being completely destitute. If I were to fall ill I could not pay to be nursed even at a hospital. Thoughts like these troubled me even in my sleep; it was horrible, horrible.

In those sad days how I sympathized with the many wretched creatures I saw in the streets—the poor, the blind, the lame, and the hungry. My heart positively bled for those people; and I could do absolutely nothing for them.

What a blessed thing it is to have means! And yet how often those who have them do not enough appreciate them, not having known the bitterness of poverty, and do not learn what intense happiness it is to help poor unfortunate creatures devoid of everything.

How often I longed to ask poor women, pale and sad, offering some trifle or other for sale, what ailed them; to find out where they lived, and to try to put them in the way of more profitable occupation. Or men I saw in the streets, unemployed, sullen and dogged looking—how I would like to have asked what were their circumstances, and to have helped them. Alas, I could not even help myself; how could I help others? There was a poor old Frenchman who came once or twice a week into the street where I lived. He generally came late in the evening. I used to hear him cough and then he would begin some old French song, very sad and plaintive in itself and still more so as he sang it; then he would attempt to render the martial strains of the "*Marseillaise*"—which certainly had nothing martial about them coming from that feeble old man who had to stop between nearly every bar to cough. Poor man; how came he there? If one had but a few pounds to spare to send him home to his native village and support him through his few remaining years! He came every day

of the six months I was there. Often his voice was so feeble and his cough so terrible that it was wonderful to me that he kept alive till the summer.

Many others besides my poor old countryman passed through that street wailing out their discordant and pitiful songs, especially on Sundays, when there were few carriages passing and the street was quieter. Oh, what a noisy street it was throughout the week! At first I thought I liked it—it gave one a pleasant sense of movement and life; but in a few days I began to think the milkmen and costermongers rather a nuisance; after the first week I regarded them as torments!

At seven in the morning the street was simply invaded by milkmen. I never could understand why these men give forth the fiendish screams peculiar to them. There was one youth among those who passed down our street who seemed to enjoy his vocal exercises wonderfully. Before each house, whether he had to stop or not, he gave three fearful shrieks, which I suppose meant "milk." I used to hear him in the next square and as far as two streets away, and I really dreaded his coming. How I wished his voice would break! But not at all: his daily practice improved it—or rather increased the strength of it. As a rule a rival milkman would enter the street before the vigorous youth got out of it. Then it was perfectly awful! They redoubled their efforts in the attempt to outdo each other. If the milk cries had been but for a few minutes, the torture would have been more bearable perhaps; but they went on each morning until they were drowned by those of the costermongers. The "three-pence a quart" man who came between nine and ten was generally the last of these gentry. He used to emit a kind of jodeling ending with "yach—tun." The last syllable he always took on a very high note, on which he seemed to linger with especial delight and affection. And all this caterwauling began again in the afternoon. From about eight in the morning till ten at night the postman's loud double knock was heard at intervals of about two hours. But one easily forgave him—for at any moment his tat-tap might herald a welcome letter. But he was not the last to banish quiet in this unfortunate street—for soon after ten the hot-potatoe men began their rounds! I declare I never see one of their strangely constructed vehicles without a bitter pang of remembrance passing through me. Somehow or other these unfortunate carts seem to have concentrated in themselves almost every feature suggestive of poverty and destitution. The cries of "all hot and floury"—or rather, "all 'ot an' flowry"—in a minor key, as these men utter them, play the same part as certain flowers and perfumes do in other cases—they remind one vividly of bygone scenes.

As the street happened to be a short cut between Belgravia and South Kensington, there was an unusually large road traffic

through it, and consequently there was a rumbling noise without cessation, from early morning till late at night—or rather I should say from morn till morn, for cabs and carriages seemed to be using it all through the night. Then there was a fire engine station hard by, and it seemed to me that very few nights passed without my being awakened by the shouts of the firemen and the noise of engine and horses as they rushed away to some distant fire. But I didn't mind that so very much, and always rushed to my window to catch sight of them if I heard them in time; for it was a thrilling sight to see the well-trained horses flying down the road, with the engine hissing like a monster behind them breathing fire and smoke, and scattering a shower of bright sparks in its trail; and one could have no thoughts but those of admiration for the band of stalwart firemen in their glimmering helmets, as they were swept past on their way to strife and danger.

I have forgotten to mention the instrumental performances we were treated to each day! They were innumerable. I should say that no instrument was unrepresented in that street. From the piano organ to the bagpipe, from the concertina to the horn, every conceivable instrument broke the peace more or less often. When there were intervals of rest from single-handed performers it was generally due to some German band, or group of Scotch sword-dancers with pipers having monopolized the street.

In moderation, I rather enjoy a good band, or a piano organ, or even a bagpipe—but a little of either goes a long way, especially of the last-named; a few minutes once a month is quite sufficient for me. I am told that in the midst of Scotch scenery one can thoroughly enjoy the bagpipe; that may be so; but between houses in an over-crowded street, it always sounds to me as if there was something wrong about it.

But what always made me feel very miserable were the frequent sights of whole families passing slowly down the streets singing hymns—the father carrying a small child in his arms, the mother with a baby in hers, and beside them two or three miserably-clad children. It was wretched! The children would chime in every now and then with their poor shrill voices, and stare wistfully up at the windows on either side as they crept along step by step. Poor little things! I used to wonder whether their parents were doing this kind of thing only in an exceptional way, from hunger and want of work; or if they were taking it up as a regular occupation. Whichever it may have been it was inexpressibly sad. These groups were most noticeable on Sundays, the traffic was so much less then.

And oh, those Sundays! They were terrible days for me. I stopped my usual occupations then and I used to sit for hours together wrapped in my cloak reading or writing—but somehow there was no enjoyment about it; I could not shake off the dul-

ness of the day. My solitary meals seemed to choke me, and I longed for some lady to talk to. How hard the conditions under which a woman has to earn her own living are, compared with those which surround a man. To work is in itself a pleasure, of course; it is the lonely position it often involves, to a woman, which makes her life so unenviable when she is "earning her own living." A man more often works in company with his fellows, and can always spend his evening at his club or with his companions; he can frequent his pet restaurant, his favourite theatres and music halls, or any place his fancy selects, where he can make and meet friends and acquaintances. How different must be the woman's life. No merry chats and funny stories, no jokes and pleasant pastimes for her. She has her one room, and in it she is expected to pass her leisure hours. When she comes in after her day's work she lights her fire (if she can afford one), prepares her meal and struggles through it as a mere matter of business, and perhaps stares dreamily into the fire the while. What does she see in the dancing flames? Not often can she build pleasant castles from them; more likely the chilling thought that as it is this year, so will it be next, and, if she lives, so will it be five, ten, twenty years hence! Her thoughts are apt to run into grooves too sad to allow her to remain unoccupied and resting, and she forces herself to read, write, or sew, until her watch shows bed time has come; and then, longing for morning to come, when she may work again and shake off her torpor for a time, she essays to sleep. As there are many thousands of women working for daily bread under conditions like these, how great a boon it would be if some nice places could be built containing suitable apartments, in which large numbers could live under one roof and have suitable attendance provided. There is a set of buildings in Oakley Street, Chelsea, which answers to this description—but it is like a drop in the ocean. Many more such places are wanted, for there are thousands of women in London who would gladly avail themselves of such advantages, instead of having to do everything for themselves and wasting their sixpences and shillings on all sides in paying for every little service done for them.

One morning, when I was occupied cleaning potatoes and carrots and thinking sadly of my dwindling sovereigns, the servant entered my room to tell me a lady was down stairs and wanted to speak to me. I quickly covered my vegetables with a newspaper and rushed down stairs to show her up. She told me she lived quite near and had seen my advertisement, and would I give lessons to her daughter?

There was no unwillingness on my part! My late experiences had made me careful about setting up expectations which might not be realized. But this time I need not have repressed them, for we agreed on terms at once and I was to begin in three weeks'

time. I wished it could have been at once, but there was no choice. Very soon after that lady procured me two other good pupils and I was—saved! It was not an income sufficient for my needs, but it would help me toward one, and my heart was grateful indeed. The weather was getting warmer too, and sometimes the sun shone into the house in strong hot rays, such as that winter had not known. How delightful it was to feel the warm rays falling on me when I passed the staircase window outside my room—my window did not face the sun, so I got none of the glory in my room. I used to open wide the staircase window and my door to get in as much as I could of the warm fresh air, and altogether I began to breathe freely again.

One evening when I returned from one of the classes I attended at South Kensington School of Art, the servant informed me in an imperative tone that Mrs. Peters—she was the landlady—would be pleased if I did not touch the window on the stairs as the lady on the first floor complained of draughts, and Mrs. Peters had a bad cold.

"Well," said I, "will you kindly tell Mrs. Peters that I am sorry she has a cold, but I am sure the fresh air on the third floor cannot possibly hurt her in the basement, and I do not think the lady on the first floor can feel any draught from an open window on the third floor."

"Ah, but the lady on the first floor is very particular, because she suffers dreadful of rheumatics."

"I am sorry for that of course," I said, "but sunny fresh air can hurt nobody. Besides I have some right to be considered as well as she, and I object to having all the bad air rising from the bottom of the house to my room when I can have fresh air instead."

"Very well, miss. I shall tell her."

In the end I gained my point; but from that time Mrs. Peters turned sulky toward me. I thought she would be all right in a few days. But oh, dear no! For the next three months she never once put her foot inside my room, and she avoided me as if I had been a pestilence. Evidently I had offended her terribly in opposing my desires to her commands. I thought her temper quite a peculiar one; apparently she thought she had a right to it, but did not reckon on my having one too.

She paid me out though. I sometimes bought fresh herrings for my supper and got them broiled in the kitchen according to our little agreement. The sand in the fish rather lessened my enjoyment sometimes, but I considered it a dainty food on the whole. One day the servant said, "Mrs. Peters is very sorry, but the herring fell in the cinders," and uncovered the dish. There was my herring, all broken up and burnt. I tried to eat some and found my mouth full of what I had always taken for sand. After that I tried herrings a few more times, but they some-

how always fell into the cinders, and I had to give them up and rest content with bread and butter. I thought of Tantalus' punishment—there I had my fish, my appetite was excited by its delicate fragrance and yet I could not eat it.

After May had passed into June, and the discomforts of the cold winter had passed away, with the advent of milder temperature I began to feel quite at home in my room, notwithstanding the sandy herrings. I had got accustomed to hard fare, and could more easily accommodate myself to circumstances than I could at first. In June the weather became unusually warm, and then I found that my garret was quite as hot in summer as it had been cold in winter; and, being near the roof, the room scarcely had time to cool at night before the sun was blazing out again in the morning and at once making the place like an oven again. I liked it at first, it was so pleasant compared with the months before, but it had a bad effect upon my health; I became very weak and nervous, and could hardly drag myself from one place to another. Fortunately I was not then without friends. The lady in whose house I lived six years was in town and looked after me like a mother would have done; and a great friend of hers came with her daughter to see me, and invited me to her house often and showed me much kindness. Then, too, I discovered one day that the people who lived next door to me were old friends of mine. We chanced to meet in the street, and of course renewed our acquaintance. They too were very kind to me, and I spent many hours with them in the warm summer evenings. It was a great comfort to me to feel that if I got weaker and could not leave my bed I should not now be entirely at the mercy of strangers.

But though I made new and dear friends I did not get any more pupils. All my friends were looking out for me, but their efforts were in vain, so far as any immediate result was concerned. It seemed as though all the children requiring tuition had disappeared as by magic. And then every one was so busy in connection with the Jubilee festivities, and all the ladies seemed to spend enormous sums to get seats to view the procession from, and so no doubt they did not care to pay for lessons for their children just then. I am heartily glad that there will not be another Jubilee in my time.

I got so weak and feeble that I was thankful that holiday time was near. I wondered how I could set aside money enough to pay my expenses to the houses I had been invited to pass my holidays in. One day I suddenly remembered that I had once lent a sum of money to a friend of mine. I wrote a letter at once (which fortunately reached her) asking if she could let me have it back as it would be of very great service to me. Happily for me she sent it to me immediately, and I was enabled to start on my holidays with an easy mind

How glad I was to leave that house. I took all my things away with me as I could not afford to keep on the room in my absence, and moreover had no intention of returning to a house in which I had suffered so much. When I came back to London after my holidays I settled myself in the garret I occupy now. It is of course next the roof, and it has only one window and no fire-place at all. This sounds worse than the description of my former abode. Ah, yes; but it is a nicely furnished room and has a good bed, the window fastens properly and faces the afternoon sun—a great point with me—and the street is a quiet one, though to be sure there is the Metropolitan District Railway on the other side of the house. There is a little oil stove in the room to warm the air, but it gave out such a terrible stench the first time I lighted it (not having been cleaned for some months) that I had to open the window to get some fresh air in, and found myself with a terrible cold in a day or two. I had the stove properly cleaned and found it more bearable, but the warmth is very sickly and cannot be healthy, so that I have not used it since the first week I came, when the weather happened to be cold. I daresay I shall move again if I find another room as nice as this one and *with* a fire-place, but for the present I am disinclined to look for one. There is no cooking done in this house, so I have to get all my meals sent in from a restaurant close by, but with my little spirit lamp I can make myself hot tea at any time. To my intense surprise I feel perfectly content here; I suppose I am hardened, and I daresay I am approaching my ideal Diogenes, and that to live next in a tub will not in the least disconcert me. The idea of furnishing two rooms I have given up long since as the last of my illusions, and I have made up my mind never to aspire to anything more comfortable than what I am now in possession of.

"SAVED!"

By THE COUNTESS OF MUNSTEP.

"*AHI! La bella signorina! e pallidetta! e stanca! poverina!*"

These words were addressed to me years ago by the *padrona* of a hotel, which my mother and I had just reached, after a long and fatiguing night journey; and trivial as they may appear, I remember them distinctly, as well as every other circumstance that occurred during the eventful four and twenty hours which succeeded our arrival at the Hotel d'Oro, in Florence, on the 17th September, 184—.

My lately-widowed mother and myself (a girl of seventeen) had been travelling in Italy for months, after an aimless, erratic fashion; for she, poor soul, was endeavouring, through change of scene and fatigue of body, to deaden the memory of her grief; and we had started the night before from A——, to avoid the heat of a day journey, arriving in the early morning at the Hotel d'Oro, an imposing building situated on the banks of the Arno, and formerly a palace of the Este and Borgia families, whose quaint monograms and devices ornamented its walls, both within and without.

We were conducted to our apartments by the pretty *padrona*, and as we wearily passed through the magnificent vestibule and ascended the broad marble staircase, I was curiously reminded (my nerves being probably in an irritated condition) of a picture I had seen in a child's story book, of a pretty little girl with long hair, who is mounting a stair leading to a hanging gallery, so exactly like the one before us, that as we came to an abrupt turn, I positively stopped and shuddered, expecting to be met (as in the picture) by a cruel-faced, velvet-footed panther, which was waiting round the corner, with open mouth and glaring eye, to spring upon its unsuspecting victim! A silly childish story, no doubt, but just one of those which would cling to one's memory.

The visitors' apartments on the first *piano* of the Hotel d'Oro opened upon the hanging gallery, and we were conducted to ours through a doorway concealed by a heavy piece of tapestry.

"Is the *signora* satisfied?" asked the *padrona*, as with pardonable pride she threw open the door of a spacious and beautiful *salone*, which owned French windows, opening upon a delightfully roomy balcony.

"Oh, yes," answered my mother wearily; "but pray take us at once to our sleeping rooms, for we are very tired."

The *padrona* took the hint, and led us to two rooms (leading out of the *salone* and into each other), which were beautifully furnished, but one was so small that I indignantly exclaimed, "Mamma! I really can't sleep in a *box*!—and in this heat too!"

"Have you any other room you could give Lady Muriel?" my mother asked the *padrona*, who reflected for a moment and then said:

"I have, *signora*. It belongs to a suite of rooms prepared for the Russian Princess Lipetska and her sick son and attendants, whom we expect in a few hours; but the doctor, who engaged them, desired us to shut up three or four of the bedrooms, as there were too many; so Lady Muriel's maid could sleep there also—close to her—just across the gallery."

My mother said, "If you are sure you have a right to give her these rooms, that will do perfectly." So all being satisfactorily arranged, I betook myself to my apartment, accompanied by the *padrona*; but when first I entered it, my spirits (generally daring to a fault) went down to zero. The room was so large! So gloomy! The walls were hung with dingy tapestry, which trembled and flapped each time a door was shut, or that one walked across the room; making the grotesque and hideous figures represented upon it, seemingly instinct with life and with an agony of eagerness to leap from the walls, and proffer me a dreadful welcome! The bed, too, was far from reassuring in its ghost-like grandeur. It was a carved oak "four-poster;" an ivory and ebony crucifix was nailed at its head, the curtains were dark green velvet, and plumes of feathers waved at each corner of the canopy, being constantly stirred by mysterious gusts of air, and emitting a rustling sound suggestive of dead leaves—melancholy in the extreme. Added to all this I counted five doors in the room, and the *padrona* noticing my uneasy glances towards them, assured me they were locked, proving her words by pushing and pulling them violently while turning the handles, at the same time talking volubly in Italian. I was, of course, obliged, after the good lady's exertions, to profess myself satisfied, and she was just leaving the room, when the bell which hung in the court-yard began to ring, and the *padrona*, running with apologies to my balcony, which overhung the grand entrance, called out hastily:

"Lady Muriella! *Vede! Ecco la principessa ed il principe! guarda!*" and then hurried downstairs. I ran and looked out, and true enough, the Russians had arrived, hours before they were expected, and with much curiosity I watched them as they alighted. There were several clumsy vehicles, each drawn by three horses; the princess and her lady occupying the first. The princess was helped out of her carriage by two footmen (the exact counterpart of each other,) having greasy Kalmuc faces, flat noses, and eyes *à la chinoise*, and she seemed tall and finely formed, with a clear, pale complexion, tawny-coloured hair and eyelashes, (the latter being unusually thick and long) and she walked with singular dignity as she entered the hotel.

The occupants of the second vehicle, (a sort of invalid carriage) greatly interested me. First a priest, with lowering face and

shovel hat, and who had seemingly descended from one of the carriages at the rear, entered the bed-carriage, and proceeded to hand out a bag, some pillows, and a fur rug; then giving a sign to the footmen, they scrambled up the carriage steps like performing monkeys, and slowly and carefully drew forth the long, lanky legs of a boy of about sixteen, whose shoulders and head were supported by a serious-looking young man, who I subsequently learnt was an English doctor. The young prince seemed very ill, for he neither spoke nor moved, and took no notice of any one. I was eager to see his face, but both doctor and priest were determined he should not be exposed to the vulgar gaze, for his cap was pulled over his eyes, and his figure was enveloped in a large shawl; but as he was being disengaged from the carriage, his head fell backward, and his cap slipped off, and in his anxiety to catch it, one of the servants entangled his foot in the shawl, dragging it completely off; and although the priest hastily replaced it and the cap, (casting meanwhile a withering look at the terrified menial), he did not prevent my having a momentary view of the thin face and emaciated figure of the sick boy. He was deadly pale, his eyes were closed, and he appeared unconscious of all around; till, strangely, and for an instant, (during the excitement caused by the loss of his cap), I fancied he slightly opened his eyes—and looked at me! but he was carried so quickly into the hotel that I could not be certain of the fact.

I felt no further interest in the occupants of the other carriages, but I longed to see all I could of the prince and his strange *entourage*; so I crept into the gallery overlooking the marble hall, and waited; knowing that as his apartments were next to mine, the prince must pass that way.

As I leant over the gallery balustrade, watching, I fancied there seemed some delay, some consternation in the hall, amongst the attendants, but I was too far off to make out the cause; at last, however, I saw them coming, carrying the prince up the stair, upon a stretcher. As soon as they had nearly reached the landing, I ran back and hid myself behind my own door, to see them go by.

It was quite a procession. First came the princess (how beautiful she was, and how arrogant she looked!), and by her side was the priest, talking in low, agitated whispers, while she appeared to listen in proud, sullen silence. Then the seemingly inanimate body was carried by, by the doctor (whose face was deathly pale) and some servants. As the prince and his bearers passed, I involuntarily moved out of my hiding place, and the doctor perceiving me, started slightly, and again I thought the sick boy's heavy eyelids quivered and slightly unclosed! He was followed by a troop of dirty, savage-looking servants, who chattered noisily in some guttural tongue as they walked, until the priest turned and frowned them into silence.

All excitement being now over, I lay down and endeavoured to sleep, but my mind would not rest; so after tossing about uneasily for an hour or two, I rose and ran into my mother, and as I was relating to her all I had seen, the *padrona* knocked and anxiously craved an interview; and began a long story, speaking so rapidly in Italian that I could not understand her, but my mother, being a good linguist, did, and was evidently deeply interested in what she heard; gradually, however, a look of horror overspread her face, and finally pointing at me, she put her finger upon her lip, a gesture which apprised me, of course, that something was going forward which I was not to know, and which, equally of course, decided me upon discovering what that "something" was; so losing no time, I ran to my maid Susette, who was arranging my room, and asked what had happened. At first she refused to tell me, increasing my curiosity a hundred-fold, by adding "the *padrona* had begged her to be silent." Eventually the French woman's love of gossip, got the upper hand, and with many nods and winks and "hushes," she confided to me that the young prince was—dead!

"Dead!" I gasped.

"Yes, dead!" reiterated Susette. She then proceeded to say that the young man had been so ill during the journey, that the doctor doubted his arriving alive, but the prince had such a longing to get to Florence that they hurried on. The doctor insisted upon travelling alone with his patient (great care and quiet being indispensable); but when they arrived within a few miles of Florence, the prince was taken so suddenly worse, that the carriages were stopped, and the doctor called in the priest, considering death imminent; the invalid lived, however, to be lifted into the hotel, but as he was being carried through the marble hall, the doctor called out to the bearers to stop, and before the poor fellow could be placed upon a couch—he expired.

I was too awe-stricken to speak; but when my astonishment had in a measure subsided, I began to reason, and I said to Susette:

"Who told you this?"

"The *padrona*," answered the maid.

"Did she see it happen?"

"No," said Susette, "for the princess begged the *padrone* and his wife to stay behind, and superintend the unloading of the carriages, so that the prince's luggage might be brought up at once. The *dame de compagnie* told the *padrona* how it all occurred, and she told me."

"Well!" I exclaimed excitedly, "it is a very odd story, for I saw the young prince's face twice, and he looked exactly the same both times, very pale and quiet, but not dead."

"Hush! Lady Muriel," whispered Susette, "do not speak so loud, for the *padrona*, in the hurry and distress of the arrival, did not mention to the princess that you were in this room; she told the doctor——"

"And what did he say?" I asked quickly.

"He seemed put out at first, and said he feared the princess would be displeased, but when the padrona told him that you were 'only a *signorina*,' he seemed satisfied."

"And you allowed me to stay all this time in a room to which I had no right," I exclaimed hotly (my dignity being hurt also, at being considered a nonentity). "How could you do so? I shall go at once to mamma, and——"

"Wait, Lady Muriel," interrupted Susette; "I will see the *padrona*, when she can attend to us; at present they are all in such trouble about the prince's death."

"I do not believe he *is* dead, for as he passed me I am almost sure he opened his eyes and looked at me!"

"People's eyes are often half open when they are dead," said Susette.

"May be," I argued; "but people don't open their eyes after they *are* dead."

"Ah! bah!" said Susette irritably, annoyed at her story being doubted, "the prince is dead now, at all events, for I stood by while you were lying down, and I saw crosses, tapers, pictures, and all kinds of things being carried into his room; and, the doctor saw me, and came up hastily to me, and said he had not yet told the princess that you slept in that room, and that I had better keep it quiet at present. Then he asked who you were? How old? Whether you slept alone? and then he asked me to do him a favour, for he could not, he said, leave the room for a moment himself, so would I fetch one of the footmen, Ivan by name, as he must tell him to go out and buy flowers for the death chamber; so I fetched him, and on my return the doctor put a gold piece in my hand and said, as he could not speak Italian, he might want my help again." I would not answer Susette, and I told her to leave me, for I was annoyed at getting mixed up with the Russians, angry too with the doctor for offering money to my maid, and still more angry with her for taking it; then—what could he mean, saying he *might* want Susette's help again? Surely there were Russians enough to do their own behests.

"There is something strange about it all," I soliloquized, "and I hate these Russians—I don't know why—and I will not remain amongst them; I will move into 'the box' at once." Having thus lashed myself into a state of high wrath, I burst out of my room into the passage, and to my unspeakable annoyance, I ran up against the priest, who, (with the princess,) was standing at my door. I murmured, "Pardon!" and would have passed on, but the princess, looking amazed at my appearance, came forward and said civilly, "Ah! pretty Lady Muriel, I heard you were in the hotel; have you lost your way? the galleries are all so alike. Shall I conduct you back to your room? Where do you sleep?"

"Here, madame," I said rather defiantly, pointing to my room, determined to show that I had nothing to hide.

The lady looked surprised, but quickly recovering herself said :

"Ah! so near us! You are in the midst of much sorrow."

"The young prince," I said awkwardly, "how is he?"

"Ah! you do not know; he is dead, alas!"

I had not time to reply, for the priest, who had been watching me intently, came forward and whispered in the princess's ear, upon which she said to me :

"Would you like to see my poor son—yourself?"

I hesitated—for I had never seen death—but I was curious, very curious, and the princess, seeing my hesitation, took me firmly by the hand, and opening the door of her apartments, led me in.

For a moment I was perfectly dazed at what met my sight! The room was large, and in utter darkness, except immediately round the couch upon which the dead prince lay, and there, innumerable candles of all sizes were blazing like a fiery barrier defending him from the outer world. The doctor was standing close to the body, burning some condiment, which he held in a dish; he looked steadily at me, and gently drew down the white coverlet (which shrouded the whole figure) from off the head and upper portion of the body, so that I might see the sad, but beautiful face, which was as white as the roses and camellias which surrounded it. The hair, eyebrows and eyelashes were very black, and the pale, slender fingers were lightly crossed over a crucifix which rested on the breast. I gazed tearfully at the pathetic young face, which seemed hardly, if at all, changed.

"How exquisite!" I sighed, "and how quickly everything has been arranged! May I go nearer?"

"Yes," answered the princess, "but not within the lights; but—how pale you are! You had better stay no longer."

"There is such a strange, sweet smell, which rather overcomes me."

"Ah! from the violets and Cape jessamine; we can none of us stay in the room; but you *are* so pale! You must come away." Then putting her handkerchief up to her eyes, she added, "He will be buried to-morrow; they bury so quickly here."

"Poor boy!" I ejaculated, and burst into tears.

"You will tell Madame la Comtesse," said the princess, "how calm, how happy he looks, and that we have had a devoted English doctor all through; he is here now, you see; and he will not leave Michael's room, even to eat."

I looked at the doctor as she spoke, and fancied I saw the ghost of a smile flit over his face, and not feeling kindly disposed towards him, I said to myself, "Heartless, like all the rest," then turning to the princess, I said coldly :

"I will tell my mother that I have seen you, madame, and your poor son, but," I added hesitatingly, "*does* he look calm and happy? Is there not—rather—a look of *fear* upon his face?"

The princess answered shortly, "Perhaps you have never seen death before?"

"No, madame," I returned; "but if all dead faces look as beautiful, as full of pathos as this one, "why should people ever dread seeing them?" With this I courtesied ceremoniously to the princess and left her, and after hastily dressing for a drive, I joined my mother and related to her all I had seen and heard. My mother was rather startled when she heard my account; but seeing I had sustained no nerve shock, she only said:

"I hope, darling, the young man died of nothing infectious?"

"Oh, no, mamma; he has been ill for a long time; the princess told me so."

"I wish she had not spoken to you, Muriel; I begged the *padrona* to tell you nothing about it, for fear of alarming you. I hope the room you sleep in is not next the prince's, or you will be frightened."

"It takes a great deal to alarm me, mamma," I said evasively and with a contemptuous laugh; so, after this conversation, I resolved to say nothing about my wish to move, for I was foolishly vain of my reputation for coolness and courage, and I felt sure, were I now to express a wish to change my room, it would be endangered; so setting aside my dignity, I deemed it best to leave the distribution of the rooms as it was.

A short time afterwards we started on a sight-seeing expedition, and after a cosy little dinner and a short rest on the balcony, we retired for the night. I was quickly undressed, and after Susette had left me, as I thought, for good, she returned, saying her room was so small, might she hang her bonnet and cloak, &c., in the recess within mine, which had been devoted to the carriage boxes? I was still too put out with her either to object or agree to anything she might propose; in fact, I felt that as long as she left me personally in peace, she might hang herself up there on a peg till the morning, without any let or hindrance from me! So she did as she wished, and after replacing the *portière* over the recess, she once more left me, this time locking my door on the outside and carrying off the key, as my mother (rather against my will) had desired her to do, for fear I should forget to lock my door myself. Susette had also received orders to come to me once or twice during the night, in case I should require anything. So I now settled myself in bed, and tried to sleep, but in vain, for either from over-fatigue, or excitement, or both, I was restless, uneasy, and tossed wearily from side to side. After a while, however, I gradually calmed down, becoming drowsy and confused; and all the sights and sounds I had passed through during the day revisited me, but in a misty, indistinct way, as though I saw and heard them through a veil; half-waking, half-dreaming, strange fancies, interwoven with the impressions of the last few hours, haunted my pillow. First, I was standing in the great marble hall, in the midst of which I saw a *catafalque*, surrounded by a mass of light, and upon it lay the pale young

prince, while at his feet crouched a spotted leopard, upon whose broad back a lovely little girl, (with long rippling hair,) was sitting, and they two were keeping watch over the dying boy, so that none of those black figures which were lurking behind the marble pillars dare approach. I passed on, I thought, through the hall, which was thickly strewn with roses, violets and the luscious gardenia, and as, at each step, I crushed the flowers, a sweet, faint, overpowering odour seemed to rise higher and higher, till it enveloped me in a diaphanous mist, opaque at first, but gradually melting away, so as to make me dimly aware that I was standing on a fascinating fairy-built bridge, dreamily watching the waters of the silver Arno, which laughingly hurried by, casting up a glittering shower of diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and refusing to be retained by the graceful arches which would fain have clasped them to their stony breasts. Then unconsciously the scene shifted, and I was walking through a narrow Italian street, closely surrounded by grim-looking, grey stone palaces, with their narrow-barred, vindictive-looking windows and their frowning towers; and I seemed to distinguish beneath my feet the hollow sounds of their dreadful dungeons: "And each and all these," a priest whispered in my ear, "have their own tale of wrong and murder!" At these words I thought I hastened my steps, for I felt suffocated, stifled for want of air; the streets seemed interminable, and the buildings as though they would close over my head, when lo! a holy, lovely Presence was near, and coming towards me was a young Mother, pressing Her little child close to Her bosom, as though clasping Him fast to shield Him from the cruel outer world. "Is it a beauteous picture?" I asked in a confused way, "or is it a great Truth?" for a glory shone forth from the baby brow, clearing away the wicked shadows, and shedding light and blessing on all around! Fountains, flowers, gardens, statues, now passed giddily before me, glowing and glistening in the pitiless burning sun, with unchanging blue sky overhead, and the glaring white flagstones under foot; till at last, languid and fainting, I turned gratefully out of the noise and heat, into a dim-lit, high-roofed cathedral, restful alike to eyes and mind in its darkness and silence. (That peculiar, holy, church silence, which always tells of a great Expectancy, of the hushed and breathless "looking for" a great and glorious Coming!) I stood, I thought, entranced, gazing mistily at the beauty of the opal-jewelled windows, at the wondrous perspective of the many arches, "raised" (I said to myself) "like huge sheltering arms, guarding over the Present of my childish head, and stretching far, far away (always lifted in my defence) into the shadows of the Future." As I gazed above, I beheld two angels come hovering side by side, down the lofty cathedral aisle, and with each beat of their pearly wings they shed around them the fragrant odours of incense, and the vibrations of a mystic melody. They smiled as

they passed me by, a grave sweet smile, and I said dreamily, "Oh! that this House of Peace were my home! Oh! that I could for ever join in the service of angels!" Then, in fancy, I knelt and mingled my poor prayers with those of the calm, holy-looking nuns, the wrinkled old peasant women, the dark-eyed, brown-skinned children that were kneeling reverently on the marble pavement, peacefully telling their beads, apparently all unconscious of a busily-wicked, wickedly-busy Florence within a few paces of their altars—aye! at their very church doors!

These pictures, distinct at first, but becoming gradually more and more shadowy, were all in a moment rudely dispersed, dispelled, exactly like a mirror which had suddenly been cracked, sparred by some unseen hand! I started violently, and sat up in my bed, for I thought—nay, I was convinced—I heard one of the many doors in the room shake gently, but decidedly, as though some one were endeavouring to enter. I listened attentively, and for a while all seemed quiet; but—again! the same sound! and this time from another door, which, like the former one, opened into the Russian apartments. I watched, and distinctly saw the handle turn and the door shake! I was now thoroughly alarmed, and would have rushed in to Susette, but, to my distress, I remembered that my door was locked on the outside!

"Oh!" I gasped, "if Susette would only come! What *can* it be? What *shall* I do?" I waited, listening painfully, but for a few minutes (which seemed ages to me) I heard nothing more, and almost persuaded myself that it must have been my imagination, or perhaps, "Some one may have mistaken the door." I thought I began to be ashamed of my cowardice; I determined to be brave, and ignore the whole thing,—to lie down again,—but I had hardly done so before I distinctly heard footsteps creeping along the balcony and stopping at my window,—which was only lightly hooked together, for it was very warm, and it had never struck me, till now, that as my room belonged to the Russian suite, so did the balcony, and was therefore not divided from theirs. Breathlessly I listened, and, tremblingly leaping out of bed, I threw on my dressing-gown,—stole to the window,—and, gently pushing aside the blind, looked out,—and never, to my dying day, shall I forget my horror when I became aware of *a man's face, within an inch of my own, peering in at me!*

Terror nearly paralyzed me, but did not prevent my recognizing in the coarse Kalmuc type of the intruder, the face of one of the Russian men-servants!

I could not move or scream,—but at a signal from the Russian, to my utter amaze and bewilderment, who should appear at his side but the "dead" prince! He was making imploring signs to me to be silent—not to be afraid, and, above all things, to let him in! The poor young face was so livid,—the eyes so strained with terror; the tears, too, were coursing so visibly down the

thin haggard cheeks, and the attitude was so touchingly humble and imploring, that my fright turned into pity, and I felt intuitively that in some mysterious way, I held the life, or death, of this trembling creature in my hands. Impelled, therefore, by the power of mercy, and hurriedly eager to save I knew not who, from I knew not what, I unhooked the window, and the prince crept noiselessly in! To my unspeakable relief the footman fell back, evidently on the watch, and the poor boy sank at my feet, gasping out in a mixture of languages, "Oh, Lady Muriella, *pour l'amour de Dieu*, save me! Let me out at your door!"

"Good Heavens!" I cried, "it is locked on the outside!"

"Hide me, then, hide me!" he sobbed,—as, in an agony of supplication, he clasped my gown. "Your white *robe* and your *tête dorée* make you look like an *angiol di Dio*! Be one to me, Muriella, an *angiol protettore*! *Écoutez*, the good doctor and poor Ivan have risked much. The doctor made me feign death, and he has drugged the *padre*, and watches him, but he will soon wake! Ah! save me from him, from *ma belle mère*."

"I will do anything," I said excitedly; "but what *can* I do? You cannot stay here. What are you afraid of?"

"Ah! get me out of the hotel, for—" looking round in a terror-struck way, and whispering in my ear, "they are—poisoning me!"

"Rouse the house!" was my natural suggestion.

"No, no, lady! *Écoutez*! I have no time to explain, but flight is my only chance—to the English Embassy—Lord Queensland will help me, and——" At this moment the key turned slowly in my door, and I just had time to push the prince into the recess (while he implored me in a whisper to confide in "no one—no one"), when Susette appeared, sleepy, cross, and with a light.

"I come, miladi, according to orders. Do you want anything?"

"Oh, Susette! I am so glad you are come. I really will not be locked in like this! it alarms me! for if anything were to happen I couldn't get out. I must have the key."

"Lady Muriel" (with sleepy dignity) "*madame* said I was to lock you in. But why" (with curiosity)—"why are you alarmed? Why are you up?"

"Because, I tell you, I don't like being locked in! If mamma knew how it frightens me, she would of course let it be as I say. What is *that*?" I added nervously; "I am sure I heard a step outside my door!"

"It is only the *guardia*, miladi; he walks about all night and watches the galleries."

"Did he see you?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes; and he asked where I was going."

"Poor prince!" I mentally ejaculated, "there is little chance, then, of *your* getting out unseen." Then aloud I said to Susette, "Give me the key." Susette was too sleepy to argue further upon the matter, so she delivered up the key, and I let her out

and locked the door. I waited to hear her departing footsteps, then I flew to the recess, and drew back the *portière* to liberate the prisoner; when, to my astonishment, the young man issued forth, clad from head to foot in Susette's clothes! No one could possibly have recognized him, for he had tied a thick veil over his face, and the metamorphosis was perfect. In spite of the awkward, nay, dangerous circumstances, I felt a strong inclination to laugh, but I said seriously:

"Why do you not make a confidant of the *guardia*? Tell him your story, and get him to let you out at the front door."

"No, no! the doctor told me solemnly to trust to no one but you—no servants, for the *padre* always bribes the servants. Ah, Muriella, *que faire?* how *shall* I get out?"

"I know," I said joyfully, and dashing into the recess, I dragged forth a strong rope, used to cord boxes. "You must get out by the balcony—it is not high; my brothers could almost let themselves drop without a rope, and I am sure I could."

"Ah! but I am ill, weak—faint."

"Well, well," I said rather impatiently, with a touch of British arrogance and contempt for foreign chicken-heartedness; "you stay in here, while I make preparations." So I stepped on to the balcony. Ivan was standing a few yards off, watching the windows of the Russian apartments; and with a horrid shrinking, I saw the moonbeams play upon a naked knife he held in his hand! and then for the first time I fully realized how dearly he had resolved to sell his young master's liberty, and what a dangerous matter I was engaged in!

The Russian comprehended at a glance what was my design, for as I was tying the rope to the balcony, I suppose my hand trembled, for he came hurriedly forward and helped me, at the same time making signs that we had no time to lose. After fastening the rope firmly, he returned to his post of observation, and I softly called the young prince; then carefully looking into the road, to see there were no inconvenient passers-by, I whispered to him in true schoolboy phraseology, "Now's your time!"

Taking the rope very gently from my hand, the young man seemed to pause,—looking meanwhile wistfully at me; then raising the veil which concealed his features, before I could prevent it, he threw his arms passionately round me, straining me tightly to his breast, and while murmuring the word "Muriella!" he pressed his trembling lips once, twice, and yet again, fervently, almost painfully to mine, and with a great sob threw himself over the ironwork, slid down, and disappeared! The faithful Ivan now approached, and I was slightly nervous as to whether he might not deem it necessary to express his gratitude after the same fashion! but I need not have been alarmed, for after making an eager sign to me to lock my window, with a gesture of deep respect, he kissed the hem of my garment, slid down the rope, and was gone, and I was left standing there alone, with a half

inclination to slide down the rope and run away also! However, I listened to the sound of the fugitives' retreating footsteps, and as they died in the distance I remembered Ivan's warning, and un-knotting the rope, I re-entered my room with it in my hand, then shutting, locking, and even barricading my window, I sat down for a moment to collect my thoughts.

My eyes wandered round the room, and ere my bewilderment had quite subsided, I perceived that a bunch of forget-me-nots which I had placed in water by my bedside was gone! and blushing I told myself that, while waiting, the young prince must have stolen it. With this discovery tears, all unbidden, rushed to my eyes (for I was, after all, a very young girl) and a tender feeling sprang up in my heart for the individual for whom I had undoubtedly gone through a great deal; and on my knees I thanked God for His help, and begged Him to raise up a stronger protector than myself to rid the prince of his enemies. This outburst of feeling, (hysterical, no doubt) relieved me, and once more I became practical, and I decided that courageous as I might be (and had undoubtedly proved myself) I dared no longer stay alone in that room; for I feared the possibility (on the discovery of the prince's flight) of another visit from some of the Russians; so opening the door softly, I let myself out, and, with a creeping sensation, as though all the Russians in the hotel were pursuing me, I fled towards Susette's room, and to my unspeakable relief met her coming towards me! She was petrified at the *rencontre*, and drawing me into her room, asked anxiously what was the matter? I told her breathlessly all that happened, and she said she had been struck by my pale, frightened face when she had seen me an hour ago; and it had so haunted her, that she was now on her way to my room. She looked rather rueful when she heard of the loss of her clothes, but her womanly sympathy went out heartily to the poor boy when I described his terror and distress, and she forthwith began to consider how best to conceal the scene of his flight. I did not then understand that this was more for my sake than for that of the fugitives. (The "bliss" of ignorance was mine at that moment, the "folly" of wisdom came later.)

Susette returned at once with me to my bedroom, for the watchman, she said, had luckily seen her as she entered it an hour before, and he would think she had remained there all night, so we locked the door and lay down together. Not long after we had done so, we again heard footsteps on the balcony, and as the moon was shining brightly, we saw the shadow of a man pass quickly across the blind, and as it returned it lingered long enough at my window for me to recognize the spare form of the priest! but finding, I suppose, that everything was unsuspectingly quiet, and the window closed, the figure vanished as cautiously as it had appeared; and although we listened long and attentively, we heard nothing more. After a while my nervousness calmed

down, and Susette's propinquity giving me a sense of security, I fell asleep. The sun was shining brightly into the room as I awoke, and I overheard the *fille de chambre* tell Susette that the Russians had all left the hotel quite two hours before!

As soon as I was dressed I hurried to my mother and related the whole adventure. She was much excited, and proposed going at once to the British Embassy (to relate the story), which we did, and were admitted directly into Lord Queensland's presence. I was terribly disappointed when the great man assured us nothing whatever had been heard of the fugitives, and equally indignant when I discovered that both he and his *attaché* discredited my story! The ambassador was barely civil, and "thought" I had been "hoaxed," that my "imagination" had "exaggerated the facts," &c. He asked whether any person beside myself had witnessed "the alleged flight," and I fancied he seemed relieved when I replied in the negative; and my suspicions of his sincerity were still more aroused, by his evident anxiety that we should keep the story to ourselves, impressing upon my mother (who turned very pale) that we had better do so "for her pretty young daughter's sake." Being young and inexperienced, I missed the *innuendo*, but as the minister had early let out that he was "personally acquainted" with the Princess Lipetska, that she was "nearly related to the Imperial Family," and that such an "unlikely story" as mine might give great offence, I shrewdly suspected his anxiety for secrecy arose from some secret motive.

In a few minutes Lord Queensland rose, thus as he thought, ending the discussion; but feeling my veracity was unfairly impugned, I was not to be so summarily dismissed; besides the ambassador's parting words did not tend to soothe my irritation. "I advise you, madam," he said to my mother, "not to allow pretty Lady Muriel to sleep alone in a hotel again. Keep her to her dolls, dear lady; there are really no children nowadays."

This was unbearable, so losing all self-control, I said angrily, "It is a pity, my lord, that some old men should be chosen to fill high positions who are little better than 'dolls' themselves, especially when called upon to act in an emergency! And oh!" I cried, bursting into childish tears, "they are not so nice as dolls, for although their heads may be equally empty, *dolls have hair*, whereas, *old men very often—have not!*" Need I say Lord Queensland was bald?

My mother was horrified at my words, but the ambassador seemed tickled, and patting me on the shoulder, called me "a gold-headed little spitfire." I was not, however, to be mollified, and as I marched from the room, I said maliciously, "If you, my lord, will not take the story up, I shall spread it abroad, as an instance of the incompetency of our officials to defend the friendless!" To my surprise, I perceived that my words "at random sent, had found a mark they never meant;" for Lord Queensland, motioning to his *attaché* to close the door, said to my mother:

"May I ask you a favour? I frankly (!) confess I know something of the story, and I wished, for certain reasons, to keep it quiet. So will you—will your daughter—for the young prince's sake—keep the secret until you hear from me?" My mother was so shocked at the ambassador's want of candour, and so alarmed at the superabundance of that quality in me, that she would have promised anything to get away; but I said coldly, "It is a pity you should not have placed confidence in us from the first, instead of doing so only as a *pis-aller*; but if (with great dignity, I said it) you can assure me, on the honour of an Englishman, (not of a diplomat," I said cuttingly) "that silence will serve the poor boy, I am ready to pass my word also."

"Any other course of action will injure him, Lady Muriel."

"So be it," I said loftily, delighted to feel that a *signorina* had proved herself no nonentity after all!

We took leave of the minister and his scared *attaché* and returned to the hotel, and it is needless to say we never heard again from His Excellency; but in ten days' time the papers informed us that his lordship had quitted Florence for some months.

The whole story seemed to have passed away like an uneasy dream. The Russians had vanished, and their rooms were now occupied by a common-place, middle-class English family, who I heard conversing about the "Pitty Pally" (meaning, I presumed, the Pitti Palais), and the *padrone* and his wife avoided mentioning the princess or any of her suite; indeed the subject seemed so distasteful to them that we forbore alluding to it, and after a short uneventful period had elapsed, we directed our footsteps homewards to London.

One morning my mother put the *Morning Post* into my hands, eagerly desiring me to read a paragraph aloud. It was a quotation from a St. Petersburg journal, and it ran thus: "Great excitement has been caused lately in St. Petersburg, in consequence of a mysterious event, which has taken place in the family of the Prince Lipetska. His highness lost his first wife sixteen years ago, at the birth of the Prince Michael, who, although a delicate child, survived his mother, and was the object of his father's tenderest affections. Four years ago the Prince Lipetska married again, choosing the Princess Myrza de Zeschaw, a lady of great beauty, and for whom, it was well known, a certain Exalted Personage avowed a distinctly paternal interest. The Princess Myrza bore two sons, and was a devoted mother, not only to her own offspring, but also to her step-son, who was much attached to her, and whose recent uncertain health seemed the only cloud in the princely pair's domestic horizon.

"A few months ago the young prince became so seriously ill that the best medical advice was sought, when change of air and a warm climate were suggested. The Prince Lipetska being unable just then to lay aside his court duties (he was one of the Czar's highest functionaries), the princess offered to leave her own young

family, and proceed with her step-son to Italy, purposing (at the prince's wish) to visit a famous but very old doctor resident at Pisa, who had known the young Michael from his birth.

"Accordingly the princess started, accompanied by a priest, a *dame de compagnie* and a large suite; and they had not been long absent before it was remarked that the Prince Lipetska became greatly depressed, and that he was constantly closeted with a certain Doctor d'Obreskoff, who had attended the family for years, but who, in consequence of increasing age, and a strong dislike conceived against him by the princess, had given up his position as family physician. The accounts from Italy getting worse, the anxious father would have started at once to join his son, but (to the surprise of all parties) he yielded to Doctor d'Obreskoff's entreaties, and instead of going himself, dispatched a young English doctor, who received instructions to travel with the utmost speed.

"Dr. Granville's arrival at Pisa (bringing his credentials from the prince) took the princess entirely by surprise, and he installed himself without delay as medical companion to the sick boy, who took to him with a complete infatuation, refusing to eat, drink, or sleep save in his presence. One day, to the amazement of the St. Petersburg world, the young Michael arrived at his father's house, restored to health, and accompanied by a single servant! His father received him tearfully, but without surprise, and a few days later the whole family left St. Petersburg for an indefinite period. Nothing has been heard of the princess, and mystery shrouds the whole affair."

"There, mamma," I said, "you see I could tell them more than they know."

"What an awful thing," said my mother gravely. "I wonder what has become of that wretched woman, and whether we shall hear any more about it."

This question was answered a short time afterwards; for on the anniversary of the memorable night of the 17th September, I was sitting at my window, thinking over it all, when my mother called me, and to my surprise I discovered a travel-stained stranger in the room with her, and upon his turning towards me I exclaimed, "The young prince's English doctor!" He carried a parcel, and seemed overjoyed at seeing me, grasped my hand, calling me the *angiol protettore* and a host of pretty things, and when I had mastered my surprise I exclaimed, "How is the poor boy? Do—do tell me everything from the very beginning."

The young man smiled and said, "I have little to tell, or rather little that I may tell; and ere I begin may I beg of you both to keep all you know sacred? For although to some degree the story has become public, the whole truth is not known, and for the prince's sake I beg this favour of you."

We, of course, gave the required promise, and Dr. Granville proceeded with much feeling to tell us everything.

"The poor boy," he said, "nearly fell a victim to the jealousy of the princess for her own children. She was administering small doses of poison to him, which were slowly but surely taking effect. I arrived just in time to save his life. The old Dr. d'Obreskoff had been haunted for some time by a horrid suspicion of foul play, and after the princess's hurried departure to Italy, he determined to search her apartments privately, and he discovered such tangible proofs of her guilt—proofs, however, which a knowledge of medicine alone could recognize,—that he broke the awful truth to the prince, who could scarcely be restrained from starting at once to Italy to save his son. The doctor, however, advised differently, for his medical mind gathered from the most recent accounts, that nothing imminent was to be feared, and he knew that unless everything was arranged most diplomatically, the prince would have to contend against troubles and even dangers at court, in consequence of the princess's high relationships. Luckily I was paying a visit at St. Petersburg at the time, and the old doctor knew all about me; how I had been brought up in the medical profession, but that developing a strong taste for adventure, I had been engaged in detective cases, and that thus I claimed an intimate personal acquaintance with the two most active agents in this case—medicine and murder. The prince sent me to Italy with full powers, only impressing upon me the absolute necessity of saving the princess's reputation; and directly I arrived I warned Prince Michael of his own danger, of his father's commands concerning the princess, that he was to eat, drink and sleep in my presence only, and to leave the rest to me. He was very ill when I arrived, but I soon inspired him with confidence, and during that dreadful journey to Florence I taught him to feign death. We had a rehearsal before arriving, and I found that like most Russians, his powers of acting were "first class." I knew if I could only reach Florence I should be safe, as I was acquainted with Lord Queensland and had warned him of my coming; but the journey was perilous as I could not tell whether the princess had discovered who and what I was; besides, I feared the priest, and how much he guessed of the truth. However, thank God, all went well. All would have been easy could I have taken the *padrone* into my confidence, but the prince had solemnly bound me to trust no one—no servants, except Ivan, and I kept my word. In England every one would have helped me, but with Russians and Italians there are wheels within wheels. One of my greatest difficulties was to keep the princess and the priest out of the 'death chamber,' for I feared the prince betraying himself. So I burnt a concoction, ostensibly for sanitary purposes, which had the effect of causing those unused to it to feel faint, (as you did, Lady Muriel, and as he did, poor boy, at times, but we had to risk that.)"

"But," interrupted I, "after he and Ivan had escaped where

did they go? He told me they should go to the English Embassy, but they did not do so."

"Forgive me, but they did, and were in the house when your mother and you called. Lord Queensland knew they were coming, and an hour had not elapsed after their flight, before a man came and whistled 'God Save the Queen' beneath the balcony (a pre-concerted sign), whereby I knew the fugitives were safe under the British flag. The ambassador, knowing about the princess's birth, acted with great caution."

"Eminently so," I said drily, "and how about the princess?"

"Ah, there I am tongue-tied. Suffice it to say that after the prince's disappearance, *my* personal dangers began, for I never lost sight of her, poor soul, till— Ah, well, Russian laws and English laws are different, and grateful I am to have returned safe from so ugly a business."

Dr. Granville now rose to depart, and turning kindly to me he said, "Lady Muried, I parted from Prince Michael not many hours ago, and he said I was not to rest till I had seen you, till I had reminded you that this is the anniversary of his flight, and that all through life the 18th September will be a night sacred to the thought of you."

As the doctor said these words a curious sort of feeling came over me. His voice sounded strange, far off, and I seemed to see the gloomy bed-chamber, the moon-lit window, the boy in agonized supplication at my feet—the—

The doctor went on: "He sends an offering of humble gratitude; his words were, 'Put it into her own dear hands, but tell her to open it alone, tell her as she opens it, my voice will greet her, and tell her, oh tell her, we must meet again.'"

Without a word I took the parcel. I knew the doctor raised my hand and kissed it, and that, bowing to my mother, he left the room. I went slowly, dreamily upstairs, hearing as I did so the front door open and shut and the prince's messenger pass out and away! Sitting by my bed I passively recalled the words, "We must meet again," and eagerly tearing off the paper covering of the parcel I discovered a velvet casket, upon which "Muriella" was stamped in letters of gold. I took the pretty gold key and opened the casket, and I beheld a necklace of eighteen pearls (a pearl, I understood, for each day), and attached to it was a heart, pierced through by a diamond arrow. At the back of the arrow these words were engraved:

"Firenze,
Il 18 Settembre, 184—,
Gratitudine, Fede, Amore."

The heart opened, and within it I found—a shred of twisted rope—and a few withered forget-me-nots. I shed a few tears, I knew not why, and ran down and showed it to my mother.

"AS NIGHT FOLLOWS DAY."

A STORY IN TWO PARTS,

By HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "KILCORRAN," "ROBIN ADAIR," "DREAM FACES," ETC.

"To thine own self be true,
And it shall follow, as the night the day,
Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

Hamlet.

PART I.

"WELL, it's my last chance of pulling through, mother, so there's no use hesitating about it; all your life you have been urging me to marry an heiress, and now that I want to do so, you make moan over it as if I were bringing utter disgrace on the whole family!"

And Lord Francis Erldon, the impecunious younger son of a defunct Scotch peer, threw the morning paper down on the breakfast-table with most unnecessary violence, as he rose from his chair and took up a commanding position on the hearthrug, the better to face his lady-mother and all her expected remonstrances.

The Dowager Countess of Knottinghame was *très-grande dame*, that all the world realized, for was she not born a Pendragon of Tintagel, a family which claimed to have lived for many generations before ever the Norman laid the Saxon low? And as if it were not hard enough to know that her eldest son was a confirmed old bachelor, with a mania for moths, here was her favourite child, her Benjamin, threatening to sully the family escutcheon by a contemplated matrimonial alliance with a simple manufacturer's daughter, to whose children the time-honoured title of Knottinghame must in all probability descend.

The great cheerful breakfast-room at Erldon House was a perfect blaze of warmth and sunshine on this bright September morning, but the faces of both mother and son were clouded and dark, and the barometer stood obviously at "stormy."

"If her father had only been in some decent trade, I should not have minded half so much," observed the irate Dowager,

after a melancholy pause. "But I must say, my dear Francis, I do draw the line at *buttons*!"

"Well, mother, it's not to be denied that the great firm of Harding, Metal and Company certainly did make their money by the manufacture of those useful little articles, but I don't see what that matters? A button 'rampant' will make a nice change in the family arms, with their endless dragons and wyvernes!" And a smile of lazy amusement crossed Lord Francis' well-bred face as he glanced mischievously at his agitated parent.

"Now look here, my dear mother," he continued with sudden gravity, "let us face the whole position quietly, and then I think you will very likely come round to my opinion without another word. It's no novelty to you to hear that I am hard up, for I never was anything else so long as I can remember, but as yet my impecuniosity has been merely steady and chronic. Now, however, a crisis has arrived, and it simply comes to this—I *can't* go on any longer! I know that Knottinghame can't afford to do more for me than he has done, and I won't take another penny of yours—I've robbed you both enough as it is. But money I *must* have, by hook or by crook, and all I ask you is: to help me procure it by what seems the most feasible way. This daughter of old Harding the millionaire is the daughter of one of your oldest school friends, no matter whether the latter married a button manufacturer or a king; therefore it is easy enough for you to ask her to come and stay here for a bit, and as she has neither father nor mother to consult, and has seldom left her dreary home amongst the smoky factory chimneys of the Black Country, it's easy also to predict that she will very gladly accept your invitation, *voilà tout*."

"No, it's *not* all," moaned the Dowager, refusing to be comforted. "Next week is just the very last in which I should like to ask any questionable persons to the house, when you know well how particular our Aunt Doldrum is with regard to whom she meets!"

A stern look passed over Lord Francis Erldon's face, making him appear ten years older than had been the case five minutes before, as he said decisively:

"Mother, the woman I consider fit to be my wife is surely fit for even the Dowager Duchess of Doldrum's society? If all reports concerning her grace in days gone by are true, the 'unfitness' lies more on my great-aunt's side than on that of this young girl."

Lady Knottinghame kept a severe silence. Perhaps there was more truth in her son's words than it was well to own, for the high-born ladies of the House of Pendragon had been more remarkable in times past for beauty of person than rigidity of virtue.

"One more reason I wish to urge against asking Miss Harding

here next week is, that Laura Fairfax will be with us then," and a tinge of aristocratic spite was apparent in her Ladyship's tones as she spoke.

Lord Francis' brows contracted with a look of deep vexation, but he looked his mother straight in the face with his keen dark eyes before which her own sank, as he said:

"All the more reason for her to come then, mother, I should say. It's as well to make sure that one really has lived down the follies of one's youth before asking some one else to share the wisdom of one's middle age," and Lord Francis' careless laugh told how easily his thirty-five years sat on him, in spite of debts, duns and difficulties.

"Well, my dear, if it must be, it must." Lady Knottinghame was never very long in coming round to any ideas entertained by this son of her heart. "I'll write to Miss Harding at once, if you wish it; and, oh! my dear boy, how I trust and pray she may prove even in the remotest degree worthy of you!"

"Worthy of me!" re-echoed Francis Erldon in bitter sarcasm. "You had better pray that she may never discover how unworthy I am of *her*, mother."

"You underrate yourself, my son."

"Do I? Is it a thing to be proud of, to sell oneself for an heiress's money bags? to wish to rob a girl who at least has never done one any harm, of every chance in life of being married for sake of what she is, not for sake of what she has got? No, it will be a very one-sided bargain, mother; so keep all your pity for her, poor girl, if ever she marries *me*!"

And Lord Francis walked abruptly across the room and out at the door, with an irritable bang of the latter, which caused the Dowager Countess of Knottinghame to jump in her chair in a manner the reverse of dignified.

"Certainly, his affairs must have taken a most vexatious turn, poor boy," she murmured quite meekly. "And so I'll e'en do my best to secure this girl's money for him, but oh! if only it had not been *buttons*!"

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A week later, and the hour 8 p.m., saw what the local county paper called "a large and aristocratic company" assembled before dinner in the long tapestry-hung drawing-room of Erldon House.

Lady Knottinghame was moving amongst her guests with urbane and stately dignity, trying hard to conceal by the warmth of her own manner the bored coldness of her eldest son's, the actual lord of the domain. After submitting with ill grace to one or two necessary introductions to people who were there as his own guests, Lord Knottinghame had subsided sulkily into a dark corner far away from every one, only wishing from the

bottom of his weak heart and mind that he had the nerve to get up and run away, turning his back on them all *sans cérémonie*.

Lord Francis Erldon, as he stood beside his hated great-aunt of Doidrum's chair, and soothed that worthy old fidget's dread of draughts, and fears for the consequences of uncovering her old shoulders so recklessly at her time of life, formed a striking contrast to his scowling and *farouche* elder brother. His handsome thorough-bred face wore the kindly smile which he always seemed to have for high or low, and the true courtesy of his bright winning manner invariably gained for him much flattering favour from both women and men, for Francis Erldon was one of those many in this world who are "nobody's enemy but their own."

And yet an old friend of his was sitting even now amongst that assembled throng, who was rapidly changing into a calmly vindictive enemy; such an enemy as only a woman can become who sees her power over a man dying out, when her love for that same man has been merely a passing caprice, born of vanity,—not the leal and loyal faith which forgives all, and with lips trembling with pain can still lovingly say: "The King can do no wrong!"

When Francis Erldon was but a lad of twenty, fresh from college, Laura Gray had given him his first lesson in woman's perfidy—had engaged herself to him for the space of one week, during which she had coquetted with and fooled him to the top of the bent, and when the "black Monday" came, she had quietly intimated that he was no longer wanted, and must give place to a better, *i.e.*, a richer man, whose unexpected offer of marriage lay carefully ensconced in her pocket at that very moment.

The boy was too young and too honest to conceal his dire pain, and when they met again ten years later, after Laura had become both wife and widow in the interim, the eagerness with which her whilom victim accepted the very first overtures which the fascinating Mrs. Fairfax tendered to him, caused that astute lady to smile inwardly with a dulcet murmur: "What fools men are!"

And so the old game was played out in the old fashion—the man honestly and nobly in earnest, longing for the day when he should take this woman to be his wife until death should them part; the woman retaining his allegiance as a sop to her own vanity, but never for one instant losing either her heart or her head in a transaction which in her private estimation was always bound to be regarded from a prosaic and business-like point of view;—and to give up her rich jointure (as she was bound to do if she married again) for sake of a younger son encumbered with debt, seemed to her philosophical soul nothing short of perfect lunacy.

So for a year or two things drifted on, and the fair widow still

pleaded for "time;" but one fine day Francis Erldon lost all patience and forced the plain truth from her at last, that if she ever did consent to forfeit her rich inheritance, it would be for sake of an elder son and not a younger. He wasted no words on such a woman as Laura Fairfax, but turned on his heel and left her then and there—and never again did her beautiful face and caressing tones regain their hold on him.

But because he still treated her with polite courtesy whenever they met, her inordinate vanity prompted the invariable thought so soothing to itself, "poor fellow, he has not got over it." And the blow to that same vanity had been severe when Lady Knottinghame, with scarcely veiled spite, told her of the expected arrival of the great heiress that very night, and all the hopes and fears which she entertained with regard to the success that she prayed might be the portion of her most dearly beloved younger son, in securing unto himself the richly-endowed hand of the millionaire's daughter.

Seated rather near the entrance door to the drawing-room, with a background of palms and ferns setting off her pale rose-pink dress to great advantage, pretty Mrs. Fairfax was actively engaged in discussing the projected matrimonial alliance in the plainest and most uncomplimentary terms, with a confidential friend on whose sympathy she could rely.

"So vulgar as she must be, too!" sighed the fair widow with ostentatious sorrow for her quondam lover. "Think how it must gall the pride of a man like Francis Erldon to be reduced to selling himself for gold to the button-maker's daughter!"

"Insufferable! And after the experience which has been his of what a sweet woman *can* be!" and Cassandra Toady turned one eye towards her companion to see how this bare-faced flattery went down, and the other up to the heavens to denote her indignation at man's fatuity.

"Take care, my dear Cassandra, your emotion is mastering your eyesight," observed Mrs. Fairfax spitefully. "I couldn't tell for an instant whether you were admiring the chandelier or myself! But I wonder whether this heiress will appear covered with diamonds presently—she's sure to do something outrageous."

"And they say she possesses the finest diamonds in the world!" murmured the Toady enthusiastically. She had not yet forgiven the last snub.

"Paste, I daresay, all the same. Let us hope that at least her *gold* is not glitter only, else Lord Francis Erldon will have made a sorry bargain after all when he marries old Harding's daughter to save himself from bankruptcy."

The clear, metallic tones of Mrs. Fairfax struck distinctly on the ear of one who at that moment entered the door which was close behind the former lady's seat, and who for one single in-

stant paused and stood still, as if listening for more. Then a quiet smile of contempt crossed the stranger's face, and Janet Harding walked directly across the circle of assembled guests to greet her hostess, with the most admirable composure and self-possession.

A tall, slender girl, dressed very simply in white, and with no single stone of all her vaunted diamonds on either arms or neck, the millionaire's daughter had still a distinct personality of her own which made her stand out clearly from the crowd of fashionable women surrounding her. Unlike these latter, her hair was put back from her forehead quite simply, and twisted into a mass of reddish-brown plaits at the back of a very neat head; and though she could never by any chance lay claim to the coveted title of a beauty, there was that in Janet Harding's face which made whomsoever looked at it once, look at it again and again.

Its most striking characteristic was a resoluteness almost strange in the face of so young a girl, and her grey eyes had the same deep resolute look which matched so well with it, and which seemed to speak of great decision of character. But the bright honest smile which flashed all over her face as she spoke in answer to Lady Knottinghame's somewhat ostentatious greeting, seemed to lessen her age by years, and render her at once into a shy child, rather than a great heiress who had already attained to the dignity of twenty-one years.

"My youngest son must be presented to you, Miss Harding, in place of his elder brother, who is deep in an entomological discussion at the far end of the room," said Lady Knottinghame apologetically. "Lord Francis Erldon—Miss Harding."

The frank grey eyes that met his own with a quick, penetrating look had a discomposing effect on Lord Francis's equanimity, for they seemed to read his very soul. Moreover, he was unpleasantly conscious of Mrs. Fairfax's satirical smiles and audible whispers to her toady elect, so he cut the ceremony of this public introduction most distinctly short.

"Poor fellow, how he feels his unfortunate position!" murmured the fair Laura, fanning herself.

Could Miss Harding have overheard the words? For one instant, her small red-brown head turned itself in the direction of the speaker, and her clear, quiet eyes grasped every detail of the latter's identity, then she looked away again, and answered calmly the polite questions put to her by her hostess respecting her journey that day.

At dinner the heiress sat exactly opposite to Lord Francis Erldon, and without making his observation of her conspicuous, the latter lost no opportunity of carefully studying every word and look of his *vis-à-vis*, and more than once he found himself listening with real interest to her clear low voice, as she strove to make her somewhat quaint ideas on things in general intelligible to the

very ordinary stamp of gentlemanly young noodle who had been appointed by Lady Knottinghame to escort her into dinner.

"She's no fool," thought my Lord Francis to himself with great satisfaction. For he was quite old and experienced enough to know that "brains" will outlive "beauty" and must always conquer in the long run, and a good companion would be of more value in a man's life than faultless beauty if accompanied by lack of wisdom and common sense.

And during the long half-hour which in the course of the evening he devoted to the entertainment of the young stranger, his favourable opinion of her grew each moment stronger, for her manner was graceful and perfectly unaffected, and her bright ringing laugh fell merrily on the ear, whilst every word she spoke convinced him more and more that she was "worth talking to," an attribute which ladies who rely on their character for being "beauties" are apt only too often to underrate.

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"Is that the only answer you will give me?" and Lord Francis Erldon's tone of wrathful bitterness is in no way "put on," as he stands confronting the millionaire's daughter on the wide green terrace which leads to the far-famed rose-garden at Erldon House.

"The only one, Lord Francis," answers Janet Harding steadily. Her hands are full of beautiful Gloire de Dijon roses that the hot September sun has brought out in all their glory once more, and she buries her face in their fragrant clusters as she speaks—possibly to hide lips which *will* tremble and eyes which *will* fill with tears, for all her pride.

"You might at least tell me why it is so absolutely impossible for you to entertain the idea of marrying me?" pursues Francis Erldon with gloomy sarcasm. The rejection of his suit is causing him far deeper pain than he cares to own, not on the score of vanity, for to do him justice he is quite above so petty a reason as that,—but he has learnt to like the girl honestly for herself alone, and of late her grey eyes have had a far greater fascination for him than her golden wealth. Also the blow is an utterly unexpected one, for without being a vain man, he cannot fail to know that he is not unpopular with women in general, and moreover that this woman in particular has always appeared to be peculiarly bright and happy whenever circumstances have thrown them together and left them to their own society. So he considers himself an exceedingly ill-used man on the whole, and digs his heel into the velvet sward with a vicious vindictiveness that causes ugly marks on its smooth green surface, and will bring grief to the heart of Lord Knottinghame's head gardener on the morrow.

"Miss Harding, can you not give me a more definite reason for

your refusal of me?" repeats Lord Francis angrily. "Say straight out that you hate me, and be honest."

"I *don't* hate you," and Janet's voice trembles slightly; then she looks him straight in the face with her clear true eyes and speaks out frankly: "But I must tell you that I know you would never have thought of marrying me if I had not been rich; and, Lord Francis, I am too proud to buy what should be given me as my woman's right!"

For a long moment dead silence reigns, and in that space of time Francis Erldon realizes two unalterable facts: that he loves and respects this girl who stands there before him as he never thought to love any woman on earth, and that for this very reason alone he can never again subject himself to the humiliation of hearing the scorn in her honest tones as she pronounces her decisive rejection of his suit.

"So be it, and I will never ask you again," he says quietly and resolutely.

Janet Harding glances earnestly at him, and continues to speak in a low, sorrowful tone:

"Perhaps you will think more kindly of me, Lord Francis, when I tell you frankly that were I poor instead of rich my answer would have been a very different one. But on the very first evening that I arrived at your brother's house, some words which I accidentally overheard made it plain to me, that the apparent warm-hearted kindness which your mother and yourself showed me had below the surface a mere interested design on my fortune, nothing more. And I liked you all so much, Lord Francis, that this fact struck bitterly home!"

Francis Erldon makes no answer. How can he deny the truth of her words? And yet the evening she speaks of seems to him merely a dream, so changed have all his feelings towards her become in this short time. But he sees that appearances are too surely against him, and, being a proud man, utters no word in his own defence.

"I can never tell you how great my pleasure was when first your mother's letter reached me," continues Janet sadly. "In my ignorance I fully believed that love for a dead-and-gone school friendship of long ago had been the sole motive which prompted her to write to me so kindly, offering me a welcome to her home for my *mother's* sake," adds the girl in sorrowful sarcasm.

Francis Erldon glances at her bravely and says:

"Don't blame my mother, Miss Harding; it was at *my* suggestion she wrote to you. From first to last I alone am to blame." And the dogged resolution with which he speaks vouches for the truth of his words.

"I am glad of that," replies Janet quietly, "and now we will drop this subject for ever, Lord Francis," and no tremor betrays the inward despair that is creeping over the girl's heart and soul.

To the last she had hoped against hope that her lover could have honestly denied the accusation of being a fortune-hunter, and only now realizes how truly she loves him, when pride and self-respect are forcing her to give him up.

Ah! how gladly would she lay all her wealth at his feet could it purchase him even one hour's happiness! With what joy would she give him everything she possessed in the world, and clear away all the debts and difficulties clouding his life—could he only have loved her as she loved him!

But Janet Harding's clear common sense stands her in good stead now, and though she longs from the bottom of her heart to say, "Take all, for without you nothing can be of value to me in this world!" she only holds out to him a firm little untrembling hand, with the kind honest words:

"I will not be your wife, Lord Francis, for your sake and my own. But if you will some day let me be your friend I shall like it better than anything else in the whole world!"

For one moment he hesitates. Would it be *utterly* impossible to right himself in her eyes? Would she never in this world know how truly he cared for her now, and how small a value her colossal fortune held in his heart compared to one glance from her sweet grey eyes? But pride conquers, and he speaks no word, so they clasp hands silently and each goes on their way in the world with sorrowful regret.

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The idea of beautiful scenery is seldom associated with the manufacturing districts of our native land; and yet here and there, even where tall factory chimneys reign rampant o'er the landscape, and the very sheep are blackened by a perpetual atmosphere of soot and smoke, an occasional glimpse of better things is visible, as one is hurried along by an express train "going north."

Large, comfortable-looking country houses, surrounded by trees, peep forth on every side; and clusters of solid, stone-built cottages rise up in numbers in this populous part of the country, cumbering the ground with an overwhelming population, that ebbs and flows like the tide of the sea. And in contrast to such spots as these, where half the world appears to be crowding out the other half, every now and then a bleak barren moor or endless stretch of lonely downs meets the eye, bidding a seeming defiance to the encroachments of "bricks and mortar," or the levelling efforts of plough and spade.

Eight o'clock on "a wild March morning" saw Langwold Downs in all its wide loneliness, as Janet Harding rode slowly up the winding path which led from the more civilized regions below to the long stretch of sound turf that covered the highest parts of the downs, famous as the training-ground for more than one well-known racing stable in a certain northern county of England.

An early ride before breakfast was a favourite pastime of Janet's, and perhaps nothing had been of greater service in arousing her to activity of mind and body, during the keen suffering and alternate listless apathy of the last eight months of her life, than this daily gallop over the Langwold Downs in weather fair or foul. For Miss Harding was no "fair-weather lass," and many a wandering rustic was nearly startled out of the few wits with which Nature had endowed him, by the sudden apparition of a little grey mare and neat grey habit through a break in the mist, the sound of galloping hoofs disappearing into the far distance alone reassuring him that the vision was of the earth, earthy, and no supernatural phenomenon such as his "grannie" had loved to tell of.

Of late, too, a fresh element of interest had been added to these early morning rides, for amongst the several strings of race-horses which did their allotted work at this hour on the downs every day, was one belonging to the astute old trainer who in past years had had charge of the late Mr. Harding's horses, that worthy manufacturer never having outlived his true Yorkshire love of a good horse, even amidst all the trouble and turmoil of money-making.

So old Barnes' bluff honest face beams with welcome whenever his late master's daughter rides up and joins him on the downs of a morning; and many a stirring gallop is criticized by the clear grey eyes of "Miss Janet," unknown to the world at large.

The thick wreaths of mist were hurled on one side by the sharp north-easter which was blowing on this self-same wild March morning with considerable force across the high ridge of ground, and Miss Harding quickly discerned the burly form of Mr. Barnes on his stout bay cob, anxiously directing the work of a string of horses in clothing, which were walking leisurely up and down in his vicinity.

"I'm pleased you've come this morning, Miss Janet," he observed smilingly, as Miss Harding's grey hack ranged up alongside of the sober cob, and that young lady bid him a bright good morrow. "I've something to show you that'll please you, I think," and the worthy man's face grew even redder than before with secret elation as he pointed with his whip towards the line of horses walking to and fro near them.

Janet's quick eyes travelled scrutinizingly over the group, and then she exclaimed: "I see! That bay horse walking behind old Dancing Master is a new arrival. What horse is it, Barnes?"

"It's the first favourite for the 'Two Thousand,' Miss Janet, *that's* what it is!" said the old man proudly, in a tone which suggested "beat that if you can."

Janet Harding coloured rosy-red, and eagerly exclaimed: "Do you really mean it is Culloden, Lord Francis Erldon's horse?"

"I do," said Mr. Barnes sententiously.

"But I don't understand! *You* are not his trainer, Barnes?" inquired Miss Harding with a puzzled air.

"Not before this week, Miss Janet. But, you see, his Lordship had a bit of a tiff with his own trainer, somehow, though I can't tell you the rights of it all, because I don't know them myself, exactly; but the long and short of it is, that his Lordship wrote me a letter, and an uncommon flattering letter too, Miss Janet, asking me to take charge of his colt and train him for his engagement in the 'Two Thousand,' and though five weeks is little enough time to have given me for to wind him up as I would like, I'll do my living best by the colt, and that's all I can say. Aye, but he's a clever-shaped one, Miss Janet! Though his temper's not to my liking, perhaps. But you shall see him gallop."

The unconquerable stab of pain which any thought connected with Francis Erldon so invariably brought to Janet's heart, died away in the breathless interest with which she watched the horse on which rumour said Francis Erldon's last hope depended—and for once rumour did not err.

When Lord Francis had parted from Janet Harding on the terrace at Erldon that bright autumn day, now six months ago, he had gone out into the world a well-nigh ruined man, wrecked by every sort of rock a man's life may split on. Harassing debts and difficulties surrounded him on all sides, and how to extricate himself he knew not. More than one complaisant heiress threw herself at his head, less noble-minded than Janet Harding, but far more willing to buy his title and his handsome face at any price, but he would none of them. Strange to say, the thought that once had seemed so easy a solvance of all his troubles, *i.e.*, "to marry an heiress," now appeared positively loathsome to him; and since the day on which he had clasped Janet's hand in farewell, no other woman in the world could boast of having won even an admiring look from him, or a single word of aught save the merest courtesy.

But a chance of rescue came from an unexpected quarter. A cousin of his had died suddenly, one who had been his "chum" at school, his companion in many a racing venture later on, and who, having nothing else to leave as a legacy behind him, bequeathed the best of a bad lot of two-year-olds to his well-beloved friend and cousin, Lord Francis Erldon. This colt had only just succeeded in getting a "place" in the Champagne Stakes at Doncaster, but improved rapidly, winning the Middle Park Plate with such consummate ease from a field of good horses in the month following, that he settled down firmly as first favourite for the "Two Thousand" throughout the long dead season of the year.

(To be concluded.)

ON THE WING.

By W. W. FENN,

AUTHOR OF "BLIND MAN'S HOLIDAY," ETC.

"IN the life of the present age there is no more striking feature than an impatience of space. We are striving hard in every possible way to annihilate it, and in some have succeeded tolerably well. Space is now no barrier to the interchange of thought. A man able to pay the cost can at any moment talk with the antipodes. Before the 'vinegar' of science and engineering skill mountain ranges melt, and with shovel and dynamite we dig and blast a water road through isthmuses which have parted oceans since the beginning of the world. We burrow a dry path under rivers and estuaries, and seriously contemplate preparing a course for iron steeds beneath narrow seas. Everything that sunders man and man goes down before his impatience, and so the whole earth is gradually being bound together by links of mutual knowledge and all-embracing interests. This good work must go on."

Assuredly it must and assuredly it will, and whilst fully endorsing the views of the writer of the above, it may be fairly prophesied that a more thorough annihilation of space than any yet existing will sooner or later come to pass, and by a means more comprehensive and far-reaching than any of those catalogued in the foregoing sentences. The memory of man travels not back to the time when he did not long to fly. Holy Writ records the aspirations of David in this direction, and we may assume indeed that ever since the hour when human beings began to comprehend the advantages of passing with the swiftness of a bird from place to place in defiance of all geographical obstacles, they have pined and striven to do the like. The instinct now is as keen as ever, nay, as we see, keener. Magical as are the results of steam, electricity, telephony, and the whole variety of means which the ingenuity of man has devised for bringing the ends of the earth together, they all sink into insignificance by the side of the bare idea of what would be effected in his life by the gift of wings. If it were possible for him to don a thoroughly efficient pair as readily as he can mount a bicycle, or if he could as readily jump into a flying machine as he can now into a Hansom cab, there is no conceiving what would come about

in the world both material and mental. Until, however, we are a little nearer the consummation of such a stupendous end, we can only speculate about it; but to do this is interesting. The overwhelming revolution which it would cause in every condition of daily life, not only to the individual, but to whole nationalities, is, however, almost beyond the grasp of our imagination. Although inventors of every degree, engineers and scientists of highest renown are confident that some day it will be possible for men to traverse the air at least as perfectly and securely as they do now the seas, to the multitude that day appears as far off as ever.

Meanwhile, therefore, as we are still fettered to the earth, held close down to it by that mysterious law called gravitation, we must do the best we can here. Such imperfect means of aerostation as have as yet been placed at our disposal have only served to give us the faintest inkling of the advantages that might ensue, and of the sensations which would be called up if we held the air even as much under subjugation as we do the waters. Hitherto ballooning has been of so little practical use as to be scarce worth counting. For the nonce, therefore, it is only in imagination that we can soar to the empyrean and defy our earthly bonds. We must rely on fancy for the feelings and emotions which we should experience if we were actually fitted with an equivalent for the wings of the dove. Many of us truly, it is to be feared, would in that case only use them to "fly away and be at rest," but it is, nevertheless, in that poetic sense perhaps that the possession of them wears the most alluring and fascinating aspect. The world is so full of sadness and heart-sickness, so full of jaded, toil-worn misery, that the ability to fly away from it all and find in some distant, undreamt-of sphere health-restoring repose would be hailed with avidity as a supreme blessing by only too many of us. If such were the case with the aged and the weary, happily it would not necessarily be so with youth and maturity. Their enterprise and energy would doubtless turn the mighty boon to good account for the benefit of the whole human race, so that we might hope to see an enormous reduction of pain, fatigue and down-trodden suffering. When a physical object in view could be reached with the directness and celerity of a bird's flight subjective purposes would be accomplished almost with equal rapidity. If we could go straight to a point "as the crow flies," how, for instance, the partings from beloved ones would be robbed of more than half their present sorrowful pangs! What endless solace and comfort would be brought to many a bed of sickness or death, brought almost with the wish! What gaps in family circles might be filled up by the now sorely missed beloved presence! What dear faces could be restored to our embrace, and the welcome hand-grip of old days almost instantly felt again!

"Oh! would I were a bird, that I might fly to thee," would no longer be but the empty refrain of a popular song—no longer a

vain aspiration of the lovers whom cruel space had severed,—but an unnecessary and gratuitous wish. “On the wings of love” would cease to be a metaphor merely—for on them fond hearts would positively fly to the rendezvous to taste the sweets of those precious moments of happiness only to be found in “love itself possessed.” The veritable bodily presence too would redeem mistakes, smooth away misunderstandings, and overcome the obstacles and difficulties which time and distance alone may have set up against the ultimately happy union. Romance and sentiment, as now understood, would undoubtedly suffer; but since these emotions are unluckily falling to a discount in these days, they might perchance be so rehabilitated and so transformed as to present themselves in a guise more consonant with present thought and feeling. Advanced science declares that as it advances still farther, it will gradually crush out poetry and those mythical imaginings which, so far as human record goes, have ever held a prominent place amidst the multitude of undefinable sensations in man; or that at the best it must so transmogrify the form with which the poet now invests them, as to be unrecognizable for the result of the same instinct.

It is fortunate for science that it affords this alternative, for so surely as man continues to exist, so surely will imagination and poetry exist as attributes of his higher intelligence. We may venture to predict that no earthly power will ever stamp them out or eliminate them from the intellectual brain. Imagination will continue to “body forth the form of things unknown,” and the “poet’s pen” continue to turn them to shape, “and give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.” The shape may be different, the “local habitation” may be changed, the name may be altered, but the “airy nothings” will remain. Thus we need not fear that any material injury to true sentiment would be inflicted by man’s acquisition of an equivalent for the pinions of an eagle, with the consequent control over the air which they would give him. Indeed they would unquestionably open up a vast and hitherto unknown field for the exercise of his loftiest faculties. The new and very startling facts which they would reveal would form a basis for a thousand thoughts and fancies at present undreamt of. Even his very nature might be modified, gradually changed perhaps. Although good and evil would continue their contest as they have ever done, and in all probability their mystery would remain unsolved, their consequences might assume more manageable proportions, or they might not. Who knows? Who can say? The bird of prey would swoop down upon his quarry according to his nature, but his quarry would be enabled to evade attack or escape by the equal swiftness of his motive power. Wars, for instance, might not cease from off the land, or if they did, would merely be removed to the skies, and one trembles to contemplate what effect armed hosts invading

the air would have upon the system and strategy, the weapons and the shields, of the opposing forces. Every condition, every detail of battle would be altered—so much so it might be hoped that the final outcome would be a general agreement on the part of mankind to give over the terrible game once and for ever.

Such speculations, however, inevitably and literally plunge us more and more into the clouds, landing us no one can say where. Whether we look at small matters or large, private or public, it signifies little. The consequences of the great revolution are so interminable that the more we think about them, the more puzzling to the imagination they grow. There is nevertheless a fascination, it seems to us, in the subject which carries the mind forward into the possibilities in spite of itself. The fact that their name is legion gives us little check, and therefore for the moment we will pursue our meditations a stage further. Certain it is that like a bird or a bee we should each in our degree, in private life at least, follow out our business and our desires, "for every man" would continue to have "business and desire such as it is"—of that we may be well assured. Hence, therefore, it can be assumed that he would travel direct to them—go straight to his purpose by a "bee line." This would become the railway patronized by all.

Then, as a small item in the marvellous revolution, think of the wonderful effect on the ear which this means of locomotion would produce. What a flapping, buzzing, humming, singing, whistling, would fill the air! The rumbling of wheels, the clatter of horses' hoofs, or the jarring, creaking, scrooping and puffing of the locomotive, would be exchanged for something akin to the music of flying insects. The world might then, perhaps, be likened to what Tennyson calls the lime trees, "the summer home of murmurous wings." Or the surface of the globe might be regarded as a field of grass, whereon, wafted at the sweet will of every passing breath of wind, the prosperous and well-to-do might disport themselves after the manner of "the scarlet-spotted fly," in one of poor Richard Jefferies' charming pastoral papers, who "whirls his wings about and splashes himself with sunlight, like the children on the sands. He thinks not of the grass and sun; he does not heed them at all—and that is why he is so happy—any more than the barefoot children ask why the sea is there, or why it does not quite dry up when it ebbs. He is unconscious; he lives without thinking about living, and if the sunshine were a hundred hours long, still it would not belong enough. No, never enough of sun and sliding shadows that come like a hand over the table to lovingly reach our shoulder, never enough of the grass that smells sweet as a flower, not if we could live years and years equal in number to the tides that have ebbed and flowed, counting backwards four years to every day and night, backward still till we found out which came first, the night or the day." If

we could not hope to attain through the agency of wings, to such a blissful condition of moral content as the writer attributes to this gorgeously caparisoned insect, if we could not all expect to be endowed with that light-hearted unconsciousness which Mr. Jefferies attributes to his "scarlet-spotted fly," it would be no small gain to be able suddenly to decamp from London, for instance, or any other murky, grimy region, when the dense fogs of winter settle upon it, and by a hey! presto! sort of process, spread our wings, and in a few moments find ourselves basking or bathing in the sunshine at Brighton, or in any other salubrious and cheerful atmosphere. The feats of travel which we should be enabled to perform would put us on a footing, if the expression may be permitted, with the swiftest of any of Shakespeare's tricky sprites. We should think nothing of putting a girdle round the earth in less than forty minutes, and Puck or Ariel would no longer be regarded as prodigies of speed. Like rumour we could make the wind our post horse, and spread our good news or bad, our scandals and false reports, with the quickness of lightning. "On a bat's wing do I fly," we should all hold as a scarcely metaphorical burden for our night journeys, and the mail bags with the subsequent delivery of their contents would be carried from place to place in a manner calculated to arouse with joy from their graves the spirits of Sir Rowland Hill and Anthony Trollope, or everybody might become his own carrier-pigeon.

The power to soar aloft, whether by day or night, besides the good and useful account to which it might be put, offers, too, an idea of personal and even sensuous enjoyment, very stimulating and new. To hover, to float in mid-air like lark or hawk, and thence at an untold height to gather in the prospect of the earth, spread in its vastness like a variegated carpet beneath, to drift gently before the soft winds of the quiet summer time, like a swimmer on the bosom of a tranquil flowing tide, or to descend and skim the ground, darting and whisking in and out, up and down, amongst all objects natural or artificial, with the ceaseless, noiseless motion and celerity of the swallow; to do all this might yield sensations quite beyond anything yet understood by man. The better and higher side of his nature could only be perfected and strengthened by the revelations gained by his wondrous flights, rising as he would by day into the sun-lit fields of space, and by night into closer contact with the mysterious depths of the starry heavens. It might add not a little to that impulse deep-seated in every breast, which lifts the soul at times into the regions of the blessed. The appearance of the material world from a vast altitude would inspire us with so infinite a feeling of awe, and so impress us with our own insignificance, that it is not too much to expect as a result the awakening of a deeper spiritual existence; and angels' wings would seem no longer a mere symbol for expressing the means for wafting our purified natures to the

realms above. We now living, however, can hardly expect to experience the benefits, or perchance the reverse, of the strange transformation in any of its manifold developments. The steps of science are slow, not always sure, and often necessary to be retraced ; but our faith is strong in the ultimate success of man's puny attempts to vie in some sort with the winged creatures of the air. Our children's children even may only see the beginning of the triumph, but when that triumph is complete, judging from the progress already made in contrivances for the annihilation of space with its corresponding advantages to the human race, we may prophesy that the outcome cannot be otherwise than for the general good.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SUNDAY CALL.

WHETHER a hapless young man be in love or not the world has to go on as usual. He must get up of a morning, eat, drink, and, to a great extent, pursue his usual avocations. The passion which consumes him is sedulously hidden from the vulgar eye, as something too sacred for it to gaze upon. His sufferings are borne heroically and in silence.

A promise made to a lady, even although that lady be not the object of your affections, is entitled to respect. An honourable gentleman feels himself bound to fulfil it, whether his inclinations do or do not approve. Having pledged his word, there is no going back.

This conviction was strong upon Bob's mind when Sunday afternoon arrived. Since meeting Lady De Fochsey in the train she had occupied but a comparatively small share of his thoughts. Nevertheless he remembered his appointment.

Consequently, he dressed himself with extra care, and, after eating a hearty lunch, set out on foot for her ladyship's house, whose locality he had previously ascertained. He had gone to church that morning in the hope of seeing Dot, but Dot for some reason or other was not present, and he felt the sacrifice had been vain, and wondered feverishly when and how he should see her again. If only he could catch a glimpse of the doctor then he might arrange a day for his daughter to go out hunting; but at present the future was shrouded in obscurity. He kept contriving all sorts of plans by which they might meet. Most successful projects in imagination, and yet ones that when he came to meditate seriously upon putting them into operation seemed to contain some element which might possibly displease Dot, and were therefore promptly discarded. Four whole days had passed since he had seen her. It appeared a miracle how

people could live so close to each other, and meet so seldom. And yet he had marched up and down the road in front of the doctor's house at least a dozen times. If this were to go on life would not be worth living.

Altogether, Bob felt thoroughly disheartened. Since his immersion in the brook he had not been well. He could not throw off the chill which he had then caught, and although he refused to take any care of himself, and pooh-poohed the idea of obtaining medical advice, a sense of physical discomfort added to the despondency of his mental condition.

But the walk did him good. His way led through pleasant country lanes, where the thorny bramble still retained a few red and yellow leaves, and where bright clusters of scarlet berries peeped out from the dark hedge-rows. A sharp frost had prevailed the night before. In the shade the grass was still covered by a silvery burden; but where the wintry sun rested upon it, there the rime had disappeared, leaving behind a faint trace of moisture, which lent freshness to the herbage and appetite to the browsing cattle. As a rule the Stiffshire roads are not celebrated for their cleanliness. The rain that descends lies about in miry puddles, and takes days to percolate through the heavy clay soil. But to-day there was no need to turn up even a trouser hem. They were bleached quite white and hard, except here and there where the sun had chanced to slant down upon them with peculiar force. The air was still and sharp; the sky faintly blue, fading away to a misty grey where it touched the horizon. Every now and again as he walked along, the deep lowing of cattle, or the crisp swish of grass torn violently from its roots, broke the silence. Otherwise, scarce a sound was to be heard.

Before long Bob arrived at his destination.

Lady De Fochsey's house was well situated on the summit of a gentle incline. Though by no means large—being, in fact, little more than a hunting box—it commanded a fine panorama. Grass, grass, grass. That was what could be seen from its bay windows, added to three or four dark patches on the sky-line, which represented well-known coverts, half a dozen church steeples, and as many villages; the whole intersected by rows upon rows of fences, some big, some little, but mostly the former, and all crossing and re-crossing each other at a variety of different angles. A great green chess-board, somewhat irregularly marked out, but whereon all the motley crowd of players enjoyed themselves to the full. A country on which the fox-hunter's eye rested with unqualified admiration and approval, but in which the uninitiated could descry nothing except a series of big, dreary fields, bleak and bare to a degree, and destitute of all beauty, save that of space.

Bob marched up a bijou drive, planted with trees that looked as if they ought to grow, but either couldn't or wouldn't, and rang the bell.

Upon the door being opened he inquired if her ladyship were at home.

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he was at once shown into a small but luxuriously-furnished drawing-room, literally crowded with feminine knick-knacks and conceits. Books, flowers, music, bulrushes, peacock feathers, Japanese fans, screens, ornamental photograph stands, china, grotesque monsters, &c., met the eye in every direction. Last, but not least, curled up on a white fur hearth-rug before the fire were two fat, wheezy pugs, with huge blue satin bows tied round their creasy necks, and, without compare, the grotesquest monsters of all.

Altogether, a room in which evidences of female folly and female refinement were curiously blended, producing a mixed impression on the acute observer.

For a few minutes Bob stood with his back to the hearth—the pugs occupied the central position, and he could only secure one corner—familiarizing himself with these various details, and trying to determine where the refinement ended and the folly began. But this was a point not easily arrived at, and requiring a much greater critic on art furniture.

In justice to his taste, he did not wholly approve of all he saw. He had a man's impatience of useless lap-dogs, and pugs in particular, especially be-ribboned pugs; also of flimsy antimacassars, gimcrack chairs, and little spindle-legged tables, that had the horrid knack of overturning on the slightest provocation. Good, solid, sensible furniture was what he liked; not all these three-cornered, new-fangled arrangements, which blocked up a room and made people afraid to move in it. These reflections passed through his mind as he stood awaiting her ladyship's arrival. She was a long time in coming; and, impelled by curiosity, he took to examining the various photographs so liberally dotted about.

They were nearly all portraits of gentlemen belonging to that class which Dot Lankester would probably have designated as "mashers." The same vacuous expression of self-content adorned the countenances of them all. Their hair was parted down the middle, and beautifully brushed; their coats were tightly buttoned over their manly chests; a pocket-handkerchief invariably protruded—presumably to let the public know that the owner possessed such an article—and in the matter of shirt-fronts, cuffs, studs, sleeve-links, watch-chains, charms, rings, gloves and button-holes, they were simply beyond reproach. As specimens of what careful and elaborate dressing can do, they were "Things of beauty, a joy for ever." Only not men. At least, so it seemed to Bob. There was an air of effeminacy about these mute reproductions of living objects which made him turn away from them in disgust. He felt an irresistible desire to divest the originals of some of their smoothness and gloss, and meet them in a fair stand-up fight.

Continuing his tour of examination, he came upon a photograph of Lady De Fochsey—the only female one in the room—which he remarked with some wonderment. She was depicted in full evening costume, extremely *décolletée*, standing beside a marble column, with both hands clasped tragically behind her head, thus boldly calling attention to the seductive curves of her graceful figure.

Bob looked long and critically at this masterpiece of the photographic art, coldly ascertaining the lady's good and bad points, and dissecting each feature with cynical composure. Lady De Fochsey's eyes were fine, her nose small and straight, her mouth passable, a trifle thin-lipped, but otherwise unobjectionable. No doubt, as the world goes, a very pretty woman; and yet although he admitted her beauty, it was a face that possessed no fascination for him. The expression spoilt it. It was artificial, unreal and insincere.

He had just arrived at this conclusion, when a rustling of skirts was heard outside in the passage. He glanced at the clock. She had kept him waiting exactly twenty minutes. Luckily, time was of no particular importance, else he might have felt more aggrieved than he did. The afternoon had to be whiled away somehow.

At the near approach of their mistress, the pugs began to display a slight animation outside their own immediate circle of interests, represented by the fire and the hearthrug. The youngest and slimmest half rose from her recumbent position; the eldest condescended to cease snoring, and gave vent to one or two short, snappy barks, that might mean satisfaction, but which certainly sounded more like irritation at the entry of a second intruder.

Lady De Fochsey appeared on the threshold, clad in an exquisite toilette of dark blue velvet, which set off her golden locks, azure eyes, and pink and white complexion to perfection. She had not lived twenty-eight, nearly twenty-nine, years in the world without learning the art of making the most of herself.

Bob had promised to come early, and he had been even better than his word; in consequence of which, her ladyship, instead of being already seated in state to receive her Sunday afternoon visitors, found herself compelled to struggle into the velvet gown in a desperate hurry and slur over those last delicate touches of rouge, which, when artistically applied, added so greatly to her appearance. Not that the rouge had been omitted, only her cheeks were rather more hectic than usual, and consequently required a subdued light.

But her drawing-room was so arranged that this could easily be obtained.

"A thousand pardons for keeping you waiting such an unconscionable time, Mr. Jarrett," she exclaimed effusively, holding out both her white bejewelled hands with a pretty foreign air of apology. "I was just finishing a letter to a soldier cousin of mine,

at the Cape, when you were announced, and thought you would be good enough to excuse me for a few minutes. These foreign letters are always rather an undertaking. One has to cram so much news into them, and has to rack one's brains to find the where-withal."

This letter to the soldier cousin was a most gratuitous invention on Lady De Fochsey's part, but it sounded better than telling the truth, which would have been——

"Ahem! Mr. Jarrett, I'm sorry to have kept you so long, but I had to go upstairs and dress, and my frock was awfully tight and wouldn't meet, and then, just when we succeeded in fastening it, one of the buttons went crack, and my maid had to hunt for a needle and thread to sew it on again."

Of course the soldier cousin was infinitely preferable to such a plain, unvarnished tale as that. Women were nowhere if they did not surround themselves with illusion. All admiration—all love was illusion really, only of a pleasant kind.

But if Bob had been annoyed by the delay, he was courtier enough not to show his vexation, and proved quite equal to the occasion. He declared to her ladyship that he would willingly have waited all day, if only to obtain a glimpse of her.

She smiled benevolently at him, pulled down the blinds three or four feet, seated herself with her back to the light, and motioned to him to occupy the vacant place on the sofa by her side. Evidently she was determined to make amends for having detained him so long.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEVELOPING PSYCHIC FORCE.

"THERE! Sit down, do," she exclaimed coaxingly. "You great tall men seem such a terribly long way off a poor little woman like me that I declare it's downright hard work having to crane one's neck up at you. For my part, I never can talk, unless a person be close to me."

"It assists conversation, certainly," said Bob. "I shouldn't think, though, that anybody could have the moral courage to place any great distance between himself and so charming a lady. I know I can't." And he plumped down almost on the top of the blue velvet skirt.

"Oh! you sad flatterer," she murmured coquettishly. "How am I to believe you?"

"By looking in the glass. Surely you see corroboration of the truth there."

"Yes, of several rather unpleasant ones," she thought to herself, but she did not say so aloud.

"And what have you been doing since we last met?" inquired Bob after a slight pause.

"I have gone through a variety of the most wonderful experiences, Mr. Jarrett; I feel as if I had only just begun to live, in the proper and enlightened sense of the word."

"Indeed! That sounds very mysterious. How did you make so remarkable a discovery?"

"Do you remember my telling you about my friend Mrs. St. John, and the *séance* that was to take place at her house?"

"Yes, perfectly. I have the keenest recollection of it," answered Bob.

"Well, I spent the most creepy, delightful, and blood-curdling evening I ever spent in my life, and all owing to that dear man, Monsieur Adolphe De Firdusi. Do you know him by any chance?"

"Not I. Who is he?"

"Impossible. You don't actually mean to say that you have not even heard of him. Well, you *are* behind the times."

"Very likely. It strikes me one would have to be uncommonly rapid to be before them now-a-days. But with all due respect to your ladyship, you have not yet gratified my curiosity."

"Adolphe De Firdusi—isn't it a romantic name? just the sort of name you expect great things of—is the head of the powerful modern school of electrical, esoteric and spiritualistic psychology."

"Dear me! And what wonders did this first-class conjuror perform?" ejaculated Bob.

"Elevations into space, even of common objects like a chair or a table," she responded in tones of intense excitement. "Mysterious rapping proceeding from the spirits with whom he holds communication, invisible writing, and many other marvellous manifestations besides. I confess that I went to my friend's house somewhat sceptically inclined, but I came away a complete convert."

"It's awful hard lines upon the poor spirits," said practical Bob.

"In what way, Mr. Jarrett?"

"Why, I fancy that one of the chief ideas of our mortal minds in connection with a future state is represented by repose. We associate the hereafter with rest and freedom from worry. Now, according to your friend Monsieur Adolphe, the unfortunate beings who have departed this world and gone to another, are little better off than general servants."

"Really, Mr. Jarrett. What extraordinary things you do say."

"Well, but is it not so? These poor spirits are at everybody's beck and call. A little shoeblack, cleaning his shoes in the gutter, displays mediumistic tendencies, and he may summon the celestial form; also the tradesman, also the farmer, also nine people out of ten. To me there is something revolting in the very idea."

"Ah!" sighed her ladyship. "You speak like one who does not understand. As Monsieur Adolphe truly observed the other

night, ignorance and dulness of the finer perceptions are our greatest enemies. I wish you could meet him. He would soon alter your opinions."

"I doubt it," said Bob obstinately.

"Oh! yes, indeed he would. No one can resist him. He has cultivated his soul to such an extent that he is now nothing but a mass of psychic force."

"I'm afraid I'm rather dense, but will you tell me exactly what those words mean? At present they convey nothing definite to my mind."

"Dear! how sad!" exclaimed Lady De Fochsey, clasping her hands theatrically.

"Is it? I look to you to enlighten me."

"Of course, 'psychic force' means ever so many things," she explained somewhat vaguely.

"All right," interposed Bob. "I'll take that for granted."

"And it is simply impossible to go into detail, when one is treating so stupendous a subject," she went on, wishing she could but recall some of Monsieur Adolphe's long words and high sounding phrases. "People must have faith—yes, faith first and foremost, and then it all comes to them in time."

"Again I must ask you to forgive my stupidity, but what comes, Lady De Fochsey."

"Oh! all sorts of things, as I told you before. It is so difficult to explain, but clairvoyance, and thought-reading, and—and spiritual interchanges with the souls of those who are dead."

"Very jolly if you met your dearest friend, but quite the reverse if some horrible wretch you were only too glad to get rid of kept always cropping up," said Bob. "Did you receive any messages from Monsieur Ad—I mean from the spirits."

"Yes, several."

"And what sort of messages were they?"

"Delightful ones. Hoped I was well, and looked forward to seeing me. One poor man I used to be very fond of in the olden days sent me quite a long letter; and, oh! so beautifully worded."

"It is curious that the language should be the same," remarked Bob. "Do the spirits ever make any mistakes in orthography?"

"How can you ask such a question? It's really quite shameful. I'll not tell you anything more if you talk like that."

"Oh! yes, do. I want to hear all about Monsieur Adolphe; I am an unbeliever now, I admit, but if any one can convert me, I feel sure you can." And, whether by accident or design, Bob's hand came in contact with Lady De Fochsey's, and she did not withdraw hers immediately.

"Ah!" she said, "I wish I were good at explaining things, but I'm not, although perhaps I may get to be a more worthy disciple by degrees, for Monsieur Adolphe says that if only I

cultivate my powers assiduously, and run up to town occasionally for the purpose of receiving his advice, in time I——”

All of a sudden she stopped short, and fixed her eyes rapturously upon Bob, with the air of one who has just made a great and exceedingly important discovery.

“What is the matter?” he asked, feeling rather uncomfortable at being stared at so pointedly.

“Just fancy!” she exclaimed ecstatically. “You are—yes, you really are——”

“I am—I really am—what?”

“A medium, my dear boy. Oh! you *lucky, lucky* young man, let me congratulate you.” And in her rapture, her golden head almost sank upon his shoulder, only, as one side of her fringe felt a little loose, she had to be careful, and he profited by the opportunity to edge a few inches farther away.

“Bah!” he exclaimed contemptuously, but not politely.

“Oh! it’s no use, saying ‘Bah!’” she rejoined. “The fact remains, and you can’t help yourself. You possess strong magnetic powers. I can tell by your eyes, though I don’t know yet whether you’ll develop into a medium of the first or only the second order. That depends chiefly upon yourself.”

“In that case I shan’t develop into either.”

“But you must. The process is unconscious, and it may so happen that your individual will has not much to do with it, especially if you come under the influence of a—of a——” but as she could not find the exact word, she broke off short, and said softly—“Oh! Mr Jarrett, I am so glad, so very, very glad. This was precisely what I wanted.”

“What are *you* glad about?” he asked somewhat roughly, beginning to wonder if she had gone off her head altogether.

“You don’t quite understand at present, but I’ll try and make it all clear to you. Monsieur Adolphe explained to me most particularly the system by which the magnetic current is transmitted. It is enough, he says, for two people who both possess spiritual aptitudes to meet once or twice a week, and sit for a couple of hours at a time, holding hands, and looking steadily into one another’s eyes, for them insensibly to gain power.”

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Bob. “What next, I wonder?”

“But the curious part is this,” resumed her ladyship, with a pensive smile. “It seems that the process is greatly assisted, and the cultivation of internal force immensely facilitated, when the two mediums are of opposite sexes. For instance—a man and a woman will arrive at much speedier results than a woman and a woman, or a man and a man.”

“Yes, I can understand that,” said Bob, with blunt sarcasm.

“Ah! you are beginning to comprehend at last,” she rejoined, in satisfied tones. “I thought you would before long. These things just require a little explanation at first starting, but they

are not as difficult as they seem, between two people who are really sympathetic."

"That's comforting, at any rate."

"Very, is it not? And now, Mr. Jarrett, what do you say? Will you try?"

"Try what, Lady De Fochsey? You speak in conundrums."

"Firstly, to develop your higher nature and kill the baser."

"Is that all? And pray, how am I to set about it?"

"I'll show you. You have only to do as I tell you."

So saying she jumped up from the sofa, dragged the cover off a small rosewood table that stood in the window, lifted it on to the hearthrug, and then proceeded to place two cane chairs one on either side of it.

Bob watched these operations with amazement.

"Now, sit down," she said impatiently.

He did as he was told, too much mystified to venture on an observation.

"That's right, Mr. Jarrett. Give me your two hands."

"Won't one do?"

"No, I must have both."

He held them out obediently, feeling somewhat like a captive.

"Now take mine in yours so, and press them firmly."

At this request Bob revived. He lost no time in complying with it. Indeed, he began to consider the situation great fun. They were quite close to each other, their knees almost touched, and only the small table separated them.

But her ladyship was not satisfied yet.

"Look straight into my eyes," she said, with preternatural gravity, "and after a time tell me what you see."

"There's no occasion to wait. I see a very pretty woman," replied Bob audaciously.

"Hush! You must not speak yet. It is too soon."

"How long am I to keep quiet? I never bargained for having to play mum-chance."

"You must judge by your own feelings; probably about a quarter of an hour."

"Very well," replied Bob. "But before we begin this game in earnest—for I presume it is a game—may I venture to make a suggestion?"

"Yes, if you are quick about it, but don't be long, for the conditions are favourable, and it's a thousand pities not to profit by them."

"From what I gather," said Bob gravely, "our present object is to strengthen and transmit the magnetic force which we—or rather you—believe we both possess. Now at this moment there is but one point of contact between us. The electric current passes through our hands, and our hands alone. Don't you think—I make this suggestion with all due diffidence—that if you

were to put out your pretty little feet and I were to put out mine, the effect might be enormously intensified? We should then secure a negative and a positive pole."

She sighed gently.

"Yes, Mr. Jarrett, per—perhaps you are right."

"I'm sure of it," said Bob confidently.

"And now to business," she said. "Keep on pressing my hands and looking into my eyes, and if, by the end of a quarter of an hour, you begin to feel peculiar sensations, swear to describe them, as I swear to describe mine. Only don't be disappointed if we fail to produce any active manifestations to-day, since it is absolutely necessary first to establish harmonious relations."

Bob laughed heartily.

"All right," he said. "Your orders shall be obeyed."

And then, for fifteen whole minutes neither of them spoke a word.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked away industriously and those two abominable pugs snored on louder than ever.

Now, to have free leave given you to press a pretty woman's hand, and a woman, moreover, not disinclined for flirtation, is a permission of which most men would take liberal advantage. To do Bob justice he was by no means backward in doing so. But squeezing hands surreptitiously and from impulse, and squeezing hands by command, are two very different things, as before long he began to discover. For when you are enjoined to continue the pressure at all hazards, then the temptation, and, *sub rosâ*, sense of enjoyment, vanishes, until in the end you become only conscious of an irksome effort. If any gentleman doubts this fact, let him try the experiment for himself.

For the first five minutes Bob's fancy was amazingly tickled. He discovered that the lid of one of Lady De Fochsey's eyes drooped more than the other, that the rims beneath them were not natural, and that the eyes themselves, when critically examined, were wholly wanting in expression. But the next five minutes, he began to feel rather bored, and suffered from an irresistible desire to yawn, which desire, however, he could not gratify, being unable to withdraw his hand. The last found him growling and grumbling inwardly, and voting the whole thing "a most deuced bore." He made a mental vow, never to squeeze a woman's hand as long as he lived. The nerves of his arm had grown quite dead. At length, to his infinite relief, the quarter struck.

"Well!" murmured Lady De Fochsey, who appeared in a dreamy and semi-hypnotic state. "How do you feel?"

"Oh! awfully jolly," responded Bob, not wholly veraciously, but thankful to be allowed the use of his tongue again. "How do you?"

"Strange—very strange. I have indescribable sensations. Do you see anything?"

"Rather," he answered, his sense of the ridiculous assuming the upper hand.

"Oh! what? Tell me what."

"I see"—and he lowered his voice to a mysterious key—"visions of fair disembodied women, floating about in spirit space. Waves of ether surround them. They are free from every coarse and earthly element—."

"Yes, yes, go on," she interrupted. "This is really wonderful, especially at the first attempt. It proves that you possess most special gifts."

"One gracious form beckons to me to draw near," continued Bob, still more dramatically. "She whispers that she has waited long, so long for my coming."

"Just like me," sighed her ladyship.

"Yes, just like you. She says that our communications require strengthening—that I am too far off. Ha! she bids me, with ethereal condescension, encircle her diaphanous and well-nigh invisible waist, with my grossly mortal arm." Here Bob proceeded to clasp Lady De Fochsey's tightly-laced one, the lady offering no resistance. How could she? When he was a medium, and was producing such lovely manifestations.

"My kindred spirit," she murmured, "my kindred spirit, at last—at last." Then, abandoning herself completely to the ecstasy of the moment, she added deliriously, "Is that all?"

"Oh! dear no. Would you believe it, my spiritual adviser actually commands me to press my mundane lips to her chaste ones. She does not even recoil from the thought of possible contamination, but offers me a draught of purest nectar."

To what length Bob's audacity and irrepressible spirit of mischief would have led him it is impossible to say. Suffice it, that his arm was still round her ladyship's waist and her head was within suspicious proximity to his own, when suddenly the door flew open, and Lord Littelbrane was announced.

The aspirants after psychic force started apart.

No further manifestations could be expected to take place in the presence of a third, and probably uncongenial, party.

Lady De Fochsey gave a little, startled scream, and alas! alas! the powerful electric current which had been so successfully established between herself and Mr. Jarrett was rudely broken.

But that it had been established was conclusively proved by the shock felt on either side at its unexpected and inopportune rupture.

None but male and female mediums could possibly have arrived at such sterling results in so short a space of time.

If the height of clairvoyance had been reached in one single *séance*, what might not be hoped for at the next meeting?

To the earnest believer in psychology, delightful and never-ending fields of research were open. Guided and impelled by the glorious spirit, the body might take care of itself. That vile earthly thing was of no account.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNTIMELY INTERRUPTION.

It took a good deal to disturb Lady De Fochsey's self-possession ; but for a few seconds after the announcement of Lord Littelbrane she was fairly staggered.

Her mind had been filled with all kinds of rare and transcendental ideas. It was uplifted and exalted in quite an uncommon degree. Her spirit was just ready to soar amongst astral planes and undertake a celestial voyage of discovery, and now, all of a sudden, she was called upon to attune herself to things terrestrial. It was like being bound by some horrid chain that rudely pulled you back to earth. Her discomfiture was increased, too, by the fact that, amongst the whole circle of her acquaintance, his lordship was the very last person whose presence she expected. No thought of him had entered her head ; for, although she had already spent two whole hunting seasons in Stiffshire, he had never once condescended to call, or to set foot inside her house ; and this in spite of sundry friendly little invitations issued by her in the beginning.

Beyond a few stereotyped remarks out hunting, confined almost exclusively to the weather and the sport, no civilities had been exchanged between them. After a time her innate sense had told her that this was a man on whom feminine fascinations and blandishments would produce but little effect. It was wiser to reserve them for a more sensitive and emotional individual.

So she had almost given up the attempt of trying to enrol his lordship amongst the list of her admirers, and contented herself with being on speaking terms—nothing more.

Consequently she was now at a loss to understand to what the honour of this visit was due. Her brain was too distraught to divine any possible motive.

But if, for once in her life, Lady De Fochsey felt slightly disconcerted, Lord Littelbrane was a hundred thousand times more so. His notions about ladies and their behaviour were strict, not to say old-fashioned, and he had seen enough to shock him very considerably. There could be no two opinions as to the familiarity of the positions in which the parties had been surprised. If he could have withdrawn without saying a word, most assuredly he would have done so. But it was too late now to effect an escape ; therefore, after an awkward pause, he advanced a little way into the room, and, turning very red in the face, said,

"I beg pardon. I fear I am intruding."

At these words Lady De Fochsey called all her forces into action. She felt that the moment was critical—that, in fact, her whole character might depend upon it. A very pretty story could

doubtless be made at her expense, and circulated all over the hunting-field. In some way or other, she must account for the entire business, and in a manner, moreover, that would completely remove his lordship's displeasure. The task was by no means easy. There were a good many facts against her, but she did not despair. Her babyish blue eyes, and innocent pout, and childish speeches which professed no harm in anything had stood her in very good stead before now. Besides, in spite of his stiffness and reserve, she did not believe Lord Littelbrane to be either a very strong or a very acute man. She thought that it might not prove extremely difficult to throw dust in his eyes.

Therefore she held out her hand almost affectionately, and said with great apparent unconcern :

"Intruding? Oh! dear no. How could you possibly imagine such a thing, my lord? Mr. Jarrett and I were merely trying to repeat some spiritualistic experiments which I saw the other night, and which required a certain juxtaposition of the electrical forces."

She was very good at long words. She picked them up like a parrot, and introduced them regardless of their meaning. But they sounded well—learned, scientific and so on; and, to tell the truth, his lordship was a little impressed.

"Oh! indeed," he responded. "And are these experiments confined exclusively to yourself and this—" he was going to say gentleman, but checked himself and substituted "young man," without, however, deigning to look at Bob.

She smiled up into his face with the frankness of a child.

"Of course not. We were longing for a third person to assist our efforts. Will you join us?" and she smiled even more sweetly than before.

He was mollified, but not sufficiently so to accept the invitation.

"No, thank you. I am afraid your experiments are not much in my line."

She looked at him oddly, wickedly, alluringly.

"Oh! how cruel. Won't you even try?"

"Thanks; I think not. At all events," lowering his voice, "not in the present company."

"Ah, I understand. But," shrugging her shoulders "it was simply a case of *faute de mieux*."

"I'm glad to hear it. I feared it might be otherwise."

"What! with your experience?" Then she rested her hand on his coat-sleeve, and said in a louder key, "Dear Lord Littelbrane, you must really let me initiate you into some of the mysteries of the higher life. I do not profess to be an adept, but we might try and cultivate our souls together. I feel sure there is sympathy between us."

The last remnants of his ill-humour vanished. He felt infinitely flattered and raised in his own esteem. Only he could not unbend as long as that "duffer"—that nephew of Straightem's

remained in the room. He wondered why on earth the fellow did not go; and although he was not going to demean himself by talking to him, he might talk *at* him, and convey a pretty broad hint as to the desirability of his prompt departure.

"I think so also," he said, addressing Lady De Fochsey pointedly, "but sympathy requires a *tête-à-tête*. Don't you agree with me?"

"Ah! yes, of course. Do you hear that, Mr Jarrett?"

Bob marvelled inwardly at her impudence—"brass," he dubbed it mentally. But he had no desire to stay any longer and he scowled at by Lord Littelbrane, so he took up his hat, and, moving towards Lady De Fochsey, said abruptly:

"Good-bye. I must be going."

"Must you really?" she asked, in accents which seemed to say, "Quite right. I think you had much better, for you have had your innings and now should make room for another." Then, turning to Lord Littelbrane, she said:

"Excuse me one moment, my lord."

He bowed stiffly in response. Up till now he had resolutely abstained from taking the slightest notice of Bob, and desired to avoid an introduction, so he turned his back upon him and walked to the window, and stood gazing vacantly out at the green fields and browsing sheep.

Meantime Lady De Fochsey accompanied Bob to the door.

"Was there ever such an untimely interruption?" she whispered confidentially. "I declare I could have boxed his lordship's ears."

"Hush! he will hear you."

"I don't care if he does. He has spoilt our afternoon."

Bob could not help feeling rather disgusted with her hypocrisy. He was convinced in his own mind that no sooner did he leave the house than she would make up to Lord Littelbrane, precisely as she had made up to him.

"His coming was awkward, certainly," he admitted. "And I feel sorry on your account, as I fear you were placed in a rather disagreeable situation, and partly through my instrumentality."

"Oh! never mind about me, I'll soon smooth old 'Stick-in-the-mud' over. But, I say, Mr. Jarrett—Bob—I must call you Bob, Mr. Jarrett sounds so formal."

"Well, what is it, Lady De Fochsey?"

"You will keep our manifestations strictly secret, won't you? It would not be wise to mention them to an ignorant and unsympathetic public."

"Of course not," said Bob, repudiating the idea of recounting his folly. "You may trust me to hold my tongue; especially where so many universal truths are concerned."

"That's right. I knew I could depend on you; and, Bob—when will you come again?"

She might have been a girl of eighteen, proud in the possession

of her first lover and confident of her powers of attraction; but her eagerness repulsed him. It wanted the charm of extreme youth.

"I really can't say," he rejoined coldly. "It depends entirely on what's going on."

"Come soon, there's a dear creature. We ought to join hands again in three or four days' time at latest, else the magnetic current may evaporate."

"Perhaps it would be just as well to let it, all things considered."

"Nonsense. You must not talk like that. To-day's sitting has conclusively proved that we are indispensable to one another. You can only rise through my instrumentality, and I through yours. We have each a mission to perform, which should render us superior to personal feeling."

"And what will be the end of it all?" he inquired with languid interest.

"End? Why, in course of time we may be able to raise the chairs and tables from their places and suspend them in mid-air. We may get to hold an ordinary pencil in our hands, and find long spirit-messages written upon a slate; we may even see the forms of the departed hovering about our heads and whispering divine words of love and comfort. Surely you cannot entertain any doubts after the results we have obtained to-day? They were so absolutely conclusive."

"I don't know. They seemed to me to be purely mundane results at best. If they contained any divine element, the spirits must be very naughty people."

"That is because you have a mundane mind. We both have at present; but by degrees we shall grow out of all that, and disencumber ourselves of every earthly attribute."

"I doubt it," said Bob sceptically. "Earthly attributes have a nasty way of sticking."

And with that he effected his escape, and did not breathe freely until once more he found himself outside in the open air, inhaling the clear frosty atmosphere, instead of the languorous flower-laden perfumes of Lady De Fochsey's drawing-room.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, with a quick outward breath, as if to shake off every reminiscence of his visit, "was there ever such a pack of nonsense? Really, it makes one wonder what next women will be up to now-a-days. Every new craze, no matter how foolish, finds converts amongst the fair sex."

Then he walked on a step or two, and added, with a growing sense of self-dissatisfaction:

"I wonder what the deuce Dot would say if she knew what an infernal fool I've been making of myself. I shouldn't like her to hear how I've spent my Sunday afternoon."

Meanwhile Lady De Fochsey applied herself to the entertain-

ment of her remaining guest. He had felt annoyed by her prolonged conference with Bob, and she found him looking very cross and consequential, like a bird whose feathers have been ruffled the wrong way.

"Ten thousand pardons," she exclaimed in her prettiest and most penitent manner. "That young man promises to develop into a dreadful bore. He has fastened himself upon me, and really I hardly know how to get rid of him."

This was an entirely new aspect of affairs, and one infinitely more pleasing to Lord Littelbrane.

If what she stated was true, and she was being persecuted by an impudent stranger, he was more or less bound to step in and protect her from further inconvenience.

"You are much too good-natured," he said, "and should not allow yourself to be imposed upon."

She sighed, and drooped her eyes in a timid, feminine fashion she knew how to assume on occasions.

"Ah! Lord Littelbrane, your advice is excellent, no doubt; but what is a poor single woman in my position to do? She does not like to be downright rude, and yet on the other hand she is more or less at the mercy of every man she comes across."

"How did you first get to know this Mr. Jarrett?" he asked, seating himself in the place recently occupied by Bob.

"I met him out hunting. You remember the day he tumbled into the brook."

"Do you mean to say that he had the impertinence to speak to you?"

"I dropped my hunting crop and he opened a gate for me. I was obliged to say thank you!"

"And on the strength of that the fellow has actually had the cheek to come and call. Well! I never."

She did not contradict him, and left his lordship under the impression that Bob had forced his acquaintance upon her. It was a little mean, perhaps, not to tell the truth, but it saved an infinity of trouble; and really, if one were to try and stick up for all one's friends in their absence life would become a perfect burden. To be nice to them when they were present was the extent of what she could undertake.

"And what about this spiritualistic business?" inquired Lord Littelbrane suspiciously. "Did your friend Jarrett start the idea?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I proposed it at first in fun, and because I did not know what on earth to do with him. And then as you might have seen—but really I hardly like to tell you."

And she turned her head away coyly, and gazed pensively at one little slipped foot.

"Yes, yes, go on," entreated her companion, whose curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"Well, then, the young man grew shockingly familiar. I was just going to ring the bell and bid the servant show him out, when you came in. You may imagine my feelings of relief."

This was a very strange story, concocted on the spur of the moment, but, stranger still, Lord Littelbrane believed it. From that instant he saw before him a beautiful and injured woman, whose natural modesty had been grossly outraged.

"Next time I meet the brute I'll punch his head," he exclaimed vindictively, knowing, however, that he would do no such thing, except by deputy.

"Oh! No, indeed, my lord, you must not be so fierce. Mr. Jarrett misconducted himself a little certainly, but then you see he is a medium, and mediums are always entitled to a certain licence."

"H'm! And pray how do you get to be a medium?"

"In a great many different ways."

"Do you think you could make me one? I should rather like to acquire a few privileges in your case."

"I don't know. I've never had the chance of ascertaining whether I could or whether I couldn't."

"Will you try, Lady De Fochsey?"

He spoke so gravely that she suspected some serious intention.

"With pleasure, my lord, provided you really wish it."

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By Mrs. HUMPHRY.

THESE early days of spring-like weather, when the air is warm and balmy and the birds begin to sing, would be almost too exhilarating after our long and dreary winter, were it not that they bring with them an inevitable sense of lassitude that makes the smallest task seem burdensome. We begin the day with a delighted sense of emancipation from gloom and numbing cold, and a sort of multiplied enjoyment of not only this one spring morning, but of all the beautiful ones to follow it; but as the hours wear on energy droops and disappears, and we find that the apparently exhaustless fund with which we seemed provided when we rose has run low indeed, and we are victims to an enervating sensation of dreamy languor. But with it all, spring is delightful, and but for the east winds, would be the loveliest time of all the year.

The principal dramatic event of the month has been the production of "The Pompadour" at the Haymarket by Mr. Beerbohm Tree, who throws so much well-directed energy into every undertaking. The play is a great success, and to the women of the audience the dramatic interest is fairly divided with the millinerial. Mrs. Beerbohm Tree looks so charming in her Louis Quinze gowns that they will be likely to influence the fashions just as Madame Bernhardt's have done in "La Tosca" in Paris. The succession of scenes are beautifully arranged, and all London is rushing to see the Watteau ballet and the gavotte of swords.

"Christina," at the Olympic, is a success such as this rather unlucky theatre has not beheld for some years. One great secret of this success lies in the judgment exhibited in casting the play. Even the smallest parts are well played. Mr. Willard is the recipient of almost frantic applause every night. One of the daily papers has christened him "our champion villain," and he well deserves a title which, in other circumstances, might prove anything but flattering. Mr. Frank Archer plays the part of the editor of a society journal with his usual thoroughness. The authors ought to feel grateful to him for the way in which he gives point to every word intrusted to him to say. Not a syllable is lost in this actor's capable hands. He is one of the few who thoroughly study their art and completely master its methods.

Miss Alma Murray, as Christina, charms her audience. This clever actress has never been seen to better advantage.

We are all looking forward to the production of Mr. Wilson Barrett's new play, "The Ben-machree," which is Manx for "The Girl of my Heart." It is to be an exciting play, and from all I hear of it, contains every element of popularity.

"Ariane" is still drawing crowded houses at the Opera Comique. Mrs. Bernard-Beere liberally paid her whole company full salaries for Holy Week, though the theatre had not been opened, and she herself had been in Paris looking after a new play. It is not often that one has the pleasure of recording such generous deeds as this.

What are the Gaiety mashers to do without Miss Nellie Farren? Will they, from mere force of habit, wend their nightly way to the Gaiety, as did the laird to the cottage of Jeanie Deans when she had gone from it? Who will ever forget his "Hech, sirs!" addressed to no audience, as the sad truth burst upon him evening after evening. The Gaiety youth will not say, "Hech, sirs," but probably something very much stronger than the gentle utterance of Jeanie's laird.

"The Wife's Secret," at the St. James', gives Miss Fanny Brough another opportunity of proving how clever she is in comedy. The play itself is not precisely adapted to popularity, but the manner in which it is put on the stage and the charm of Mrs. Kendal's acting are sufficient to play the part of magnet to the London public.

At the Savoy, the reproduction of "The Pirates of Penzance" is welcomed by nightly audiences in a way that proves the wisdom of the management in allowing it to revisit the glimpses of the electric light. The quality of the Gilbertian humour is by no means of the evanescent order, relying on something very different from distorted puns and allusions to topics of the hour.

Mr. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry were the recipients of the usual ovation on the occasion of their reappearance at the Lyceum on the 14th, after their enormously successful American trip. Mr. Irving's programme of coming events is an interesting and attractive one.

"Sweet Lavender" is a play that must not be missed by even the most flying visitor to town. Miss Maud Millett is delicious in her part of a fresh, ingenuous, good-hearted and sensible English girl, and Mr. Edward Terry has never been better fitted dramatically. It is a touching and yet a cheerful play, a delightful and not at all a usual combination.

Miss Fortescue is universally acknowledged by the critics to have made a wonderful advance in her profession. Her Julia, played at a *matinée* a short time ago, evidenced much careful study and the studious "thinking out" of a part in all its details that is part of the very soul of acting. This young lady, with her beautiful, refined face, charm of manner, and cultivated intellect,

is on the way to become resplendent among the stars of the dramatic firmament.

Those who love a hearty laugh must go to see "Airey Annie" at the Strand, but not till they have visited "Ariane" at the Opera Comique. Mr. Burnand has produced one of the funniest burlesques imaginable in "Airey Annie," and the perfect manner in which each part is played renders the whole performance one of the best to be seen in town just now. Miss Ayrton's caricature of Mrs. Bernard-Beere is marvellously and minutely clever. The good-natured original is said to have been immensely amused by it, and M. Marius coached his imitator himself. This sort of reception of caricature upon oneself takes from them any suspicion of bad taste. All London is rushing to see "Airey Annie," the poodle and the child.

Mr. Toole has secured another successful comedy in "The Don," from the united pens of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Merivale. His adventures as a don are as amusing as, and perhaps in a tiny degree more probable than, those he underwent as a butler. Pretty Miss Violet Vanbrugh, with bright-faced Miss Marie Linden and the piquante Miss Kate Phillips, form a trio of attractiveness in the ladies' parts, which the popular Miss E. Thorne converts to a quartette.

"A Run of Luck," at Old Drury, must not be missed, nor "Nita's First," at the Novelty, under the management of Mr. George Giddens, who has sustained such a severe loss in the sudden death of Mr. W. J. Hill. The variety of Mr. George Giddens' dramatic talent has by no means been recognized as yet. The play is farcically funny.

The many friends of Mrs. Arthur Stannard (John Strange Winter) and the numerous public that has read her books, are equally looking forward to the production of "Bootles' Baby" at the Royalty, under the direction of Mr. Edgar Bruce. A military play is always popular, and in this instance there are many other good reasons for predicting success.

Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's new book about themselves will be read everywhere with delighted interest. It is written in a style that is charmingly natural, and which, indeed, exactly matches Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's method on the stage. We hardly realize as yet how much we owe to them as having revolutionized the stage. Before their time the dramatic drawing-room was as barren of refinement as the people who sat in it. The "gentlemen" were as shaky about their English, for the greater part, as they were loud and decided in their dress. The ladies matched the gentlemen. Now we hear the refined tones, the delicate articulation, and the soft laughter to which we are accustomed in real life; while the eyes detect neither staginess in the dresses, nor stale flatness in the furniture. Old playgoers can well recollect the dreadful "drawing-room" of comedy some years ago. A suite of

furniture backed up against the wall was the principal item. Two of the smaller chairs were generally brought forward near the footlights for the *dramatis personæ* to sit upon while they emitted dialogue. A mirror that reflected nothing, for excellent reasons, adorned the chimney-piece, and the walls were hideous beyond comment. Now the critics have to warn the managers against over-elaboration in matters of this sort. Much of this change for the better, and very much more than this, we owe to the Bancrofts and the new order of things they initiated at the well-remembered little house in Tottenham Street, where some of us once passed such happy hours, under the magic of Marie Wilton's sweet voice, contagious laughter, and still more infectious tears.
